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# THE STORY OF THE TUDORS

*THE RISE AND FALL OF A DYNASTY,  
FROM HENRY VII TO ELIZABETH I*



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BBC

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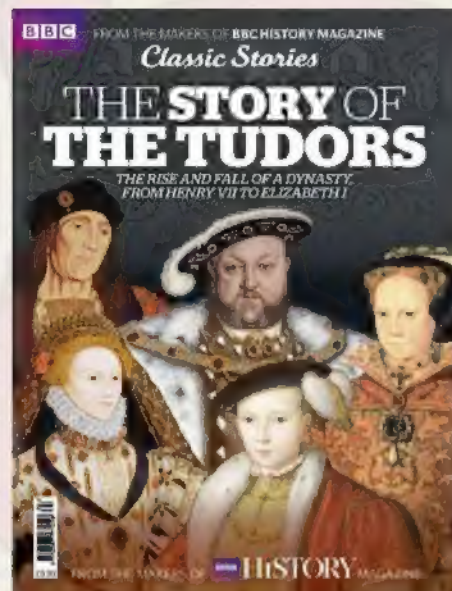


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Here at *BBC History Magazine* we share that fascination with the Tudors, who not only lived dramatic lives but also oversaw **tremendous changes in the fabric of the country**. We have explored numerous different aspects of their reigns over the years and for this special edition we have collected some of the finest articles we have run in the magazine, all written by expert historians, together with some exciting new content.

Over the following pages, you will discover the stories of all the **Tudor monarchs**: how they lived, how they ruled and why they mattered. Plus, you will find out about the great events of the era, including the **Spanish Armada**, the **Reformation** and the **revolution in English drama**.

I hope that you enjoy reading this special edition. If you would like to read more from *BBC History Magazine*, please check out the special **subscription offer** opposite.

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Editor



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## EDITORIAL

**Editor** Rob Attar  
[robattar@historyextra.com](mailto:robattar@historyextra.com)  
**Managing Editor** Nige Tassell  
**Production Editor** Rebecca Candler  
**Editorial Assistant** Emma Jolliffe

## ART & PICTURES

**Art Editor** Lisa Duerden  
**Picture Editors** James Cutmore,  
Rhiannon Furbear-Williams  
**Additional work by** Paul Bloomfield,  
Katherine Hallett, Sarah Lambert,  
Spencer Mizen, Rosemary Smith

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**Press officer** Dominic Lobbey 020 7150 5015,  
[dominic.lobbey@immediate.co.uk](mailto:dominic.lobbey@immediate.co.uk)

## SYNDICATION

**Director of licensing & syndication** Tim Hudson  
**International Partners' Manager** Anna Brown

## PRODUCTION

**Production director** Sarah Trivett  
**Production co-ordinator** Emily Mounter

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**Head of UK publishing** Chris Kerwin  
**Publisher** Mandy Thwaites  
**Publishing co-ordinator** Eva Abramik UK.PUBLISHING@bbc.com  
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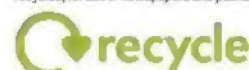
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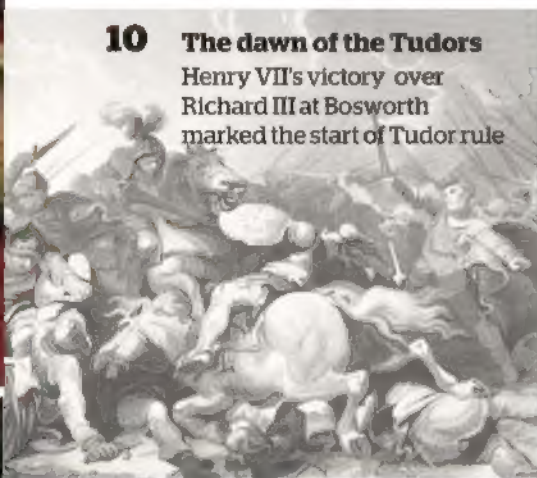


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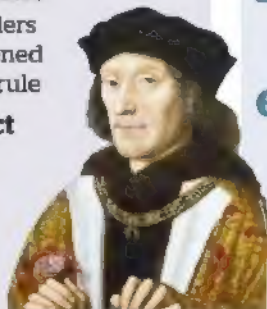


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With no proper painkillers, a trip to the surgeon was something everyone dreaded

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# Why the Tudors fascinate us

In a feature originally published in *BBC History Magazine* in 2011, **Eric Ives** asked what it is about the Tudors that keeps the public coming back for more

Ever since 1900, more than two books or articles on the history of the British Isles between 1485 and 1603 have, on average, appeared every day. And that's only the scholarly ones. Add in popular material, plus fiction and film, and totals soar. TV investment in the Tudors has gone through the roof. But why?

The obvious answer is romance – Good Queen Bess, Bluff King Hal, Bloody Mary, 'the sea dogs of Devon', the block and the scaffold. Fiction, film and TV feeds on it. Bluff and genial Henry VIII could be, but Thomas More was right to say the king would have no qualms in cutting his head off if it would win him a castle in France.

Fascination about Elizabeth ignores an England where a woman in labour might be dragged into another parish to avoid her pauper brat becoming a charge on the rates. Romance is today's celebrity cult in costume. The excuse is offered that 'it's drama, not history' – but why, then, spend thousands on historically accurate costume and scenery? Shakespeare didn't.

A better reason for the fascination is that Tudor England has a high density of 'memorable people', not least its monarchs. However this was no 'flowering of the English spirit'. Quite simply, we know

more. We visit Tudor houses. Portraits show what Tudor people were like – more than that, the image they wanted to present. Holbein 'airbrushes' his sitters. Most important of all, personal papers and modern public records first survive in quantity – letters, accounts, memoranda, narratives; evidence of all sorts multiplies. The Paston Letters, for example, are famous because similar 15th-century collections are few.

The new sources do not simply provide personalia such as Henry VII's susceptibility to dancing girls. They let us see the Tudors in a fresh way. New questions – who did this and why. New understandings – of business, society, law and order. New areas of study – gender, family, folk belief.

For earlier centuries such knowledge is hard-won; as the 16th progresses, the problem can be too much data. Books poured from the presses, ideas proliferated, our speech took shape. The King James Bible we celebrate this year is substantially a Tudor achievement: 'sheep's clothing', 'fleshpots', 'the powers that be', and 200 other expressions in use today. We don't read Chaucer and Langland in the original, but we can and do read More and Shakespeare.

The new sources appear to reveal a familiar scene: parliament, an established



church, England emerging to European status, overseas interests, class, inflation, poverty. Familiarity does, however, bring danger. The environment of Tudor England is alien as well as similar. We must not make assumptions which are only valid for today. The biggest need for caution is over religion. Think of the position Islam appears to have in certain eastern communities today – not only prescribing ritual observance, and required behaviour, but also providing a matrix of thought and ideas. Religion in 16th-century England was similarly embedded in society and similarly formative. The axiom was 'one nation, one faith' – hence controversy. Which faith? Toleration was not an option. Today it would be monstrous to burn someone because of their views. The Tudors thought otherwise – the disagreement was over who to burn.





The television series *The Tudors*: one example of the modern fascination with the era

"Tudor rulers **wielded more personal power** than any others before or since. None would recognise modern monarchs as monarchs at all"

The explanation is not a 'golden age' but 'the economy, stupid'. From the mid-14th century, western Europe's population shrank because of plague and war. A century later plague began to recede in England and the population increased. In other words, the Tudors arrived with, or were soon followed by, an economic boom – another example of their phenomenal luck everywhere except in the bedroom. Particularly from the 1540s, the expanding labour force made sustained growth possible: consumer goods such as stockings, pots and pans, new or enlarged industries – mining, glass and paper-making, the 'new draperies', luxury trades including theatre. And all was underpinned by political stability. Religious changes did not lead to civil war. Mary Tudor's was the only successful rebellion; otherwise the elite stayed loyal.

As always there was a downside – a vicious downside. Harrison noted higher rents, the pressures of a money economy and less concern for the poor. The increase in population meant that prices rose, exacerbated by currency manipulation. The gap between the comfortable and the poor widened significantly. A village economy had always needed resident poor to provide seasonal labour. Now, structural unemployment became endemic. The 1590s were horrendous as the cost of the war fed inflation.

Suffering was made infinitely worse by bad harvests; in some years paupers died in the streets. Nevertheless, the England of 1600 was enormously wealthier than in 1500. An insular, agricultural country was becoming a country with a growing trade and industry sector. New families were forging ahead to lead the country. Tudor England was exciting to live in – and that makes it exciting to study, warts and all. **II**

Eric Ives was one of the foremost experts on the Tudor period, and was emeritus professor of English history at the University of Birmingham. He died on 25 September 2012

There are other traps for the unwary. The significance of Tudor rule may appear to be a series of seminal developments – for instance, the Church of England. But the Tudor church lasted only a century. What we have today effectively dates from 1660 and it calls itself Anglican precisely because it is not the Church of England. Parliaments became more important, but only a name and tradition links them to the current institution.

Tudor rulers wielded more personal power than any before or since. None would recognise modern monarchs as monarchs at all. National identity was strengthened by the 1588 victory over Spain, but in Tudor parlance, 'country' is as likely to mean 'county'; after all, in terms of travelling time, England was 25 times larger than it is today. The colonies, the church and the law written

about by Raleigh, Hooker and Coke, are not the colonies, church and law we know. England in the 16th century and England today are "two countries separated by a common language".

### Zest for living

Notwithstanding the dangers of empathy, Tudor England does have a good feel about it – an ebullience and a zest for living. The truculence of the age is one facet of that, the attitude to martyrdom another. It is the great age of English music and drama, notable architecture, widening horizons and, for many, an advance in comfort and civility. In the 1570s William Harrison listed the changes in his Essex village: "the multitude of chimneys nowadays" (better warmth and comfort), "the amendment of lodging" (beds and bedding) and "the exchange of vessel" (pewter instead of wood).



# THE TUDOR YEARS

The days that defined a dynasty

1485

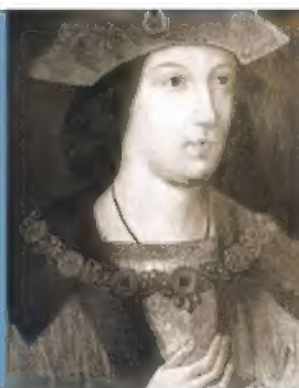
22 August

Richard III is killed at the battle of Bosworth in Leicestershire, the last significant skirmish between the Houses of Lancaster and York in the Wars of the Roses. **Richard's death and the Yorkist defeat see Henry Tudor take the crown**, ready to establish more than a century of Tudor rule

1486

18 January

In a politically astute manoeuvre, the newly crowned **Henry VII** seeks to stem further Yorkist disquiet when he **marries Elizabeth of York**, niece of Richard III. With the two houses now united by marriage, the couple's first-born son Arthur (right) becomes the undisputed heir to the English throne



1501

14 November

At the age of 15, Arthur, Prince of Wales, marries Catherine of Aragon. He dies within six months, leaving his younger brother **Henry to become both Prince of Wales and heir to the English throne**

1537

12 October

Jane Seymour gives birth to Henry's **long-awaited male heir**, but the queen dies from a post-partum infection 12 days later. Prince Edward's arrival sets in motion the Second Act of Succession, legislation that eliminates Princess Elizabeth's claim to the crown



19 May

**Anne Boleyn (left)** is executed at the **Tower of London** after being found guilty of treason, adultery and incest. The day after, Henry becomes engaged to Jane Seymour, one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting

1536

November

The Acts of Supremacy are passed, declaring Henry to be head of the Church of England and setting off the Reformation. The dissolution of monasteries begins, making around 10,000 monks, friars and nuns homeless

1534

7 September

Anne gives birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. The following year, the Act of Succession is passed by Parliament, ruling Princess Mary as illegitimate and thus stripping her of her right to the throne on Henry's death. **Elizabeth becomes heir to the crown**

28 July

After a short marriage to Anne of Cleves, **Henry weds for the fifth time**, on the same day Thomas Cromwell is executed for treason. His bride, Catherine Howard (right), isn't queen for long, being executed for adultery just 18 months later



1540

1543

12 July

**Henry marries Catherine Parr, his sixth and final wife**. Catherine is instrumental in Henry re-establishing contact with his estranged daughters. The resultant Third Act of Succession returns both Mary and Elizabeth to the line of succession, albeit after their younger half-brother Edward

1547

28 January

Henry VIII dies aged 55, leaving his only son, **nine-year-old Edward, to become king**. Despite his tender years – and the comparative short length of his reign – England's move to Protestantism is firmly cemented under his rule. Two years later, the first Act of Uniformity declares that the undertaking of Roman Catholic mass is now illegal

1553

24 March

**Elizabeth's 44-year reign ends** when she dies at Richmond Palace aged 69. With no undisputed heir, she is succeeded by James VI, the great-grandson of Henry VIII's sister Margaret and son of Mary, Queen of Scots. The House of Stuart takes the throne; Tudor England is no more

1603

8 February

Elizabeth's disgraced favourite, Robert Devereux, **Earl of Essex, leads a rebellion**. It is swiftly defeated and Essex is executed on 25 February

1601

8 August

**The Spanish Armada is vanquished by the English navy** under the command of Sir Francis Drake. The following day Elizabeth gives her rallying speech declaring that she has "the heart and stomach of a king"

1588

8 February

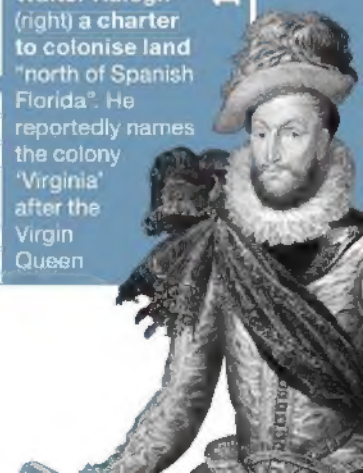
**Mary, Queen of Scots is executed** after being found guilty of her part in the Babington Plot, a plan to assassinate Elizabeth and put Mary on the throne

1587

5 March

**Elizabeth grants Walter Raleigh (right) a charter to colonise land "north of Spanish Florida"**. He reportedly names the colony 'Virginia' after the Virgin Queen

1584





# IMMELINE

1503



8 August

Henry VII and Elizabeth of York's second-born child **Margaret** (left) marries **James IV of Scotland**. The marriage becomes particularly significant almost exactly 100 years later when Elizabeth I dies. Leaving no heir, Elizabeth hands James IV's descendants a clear claim to the throne, a succession that will end Tudor rule

1509

21 April

**Henry VII dies of tuberculosis** at Richmond Palace at the age of 52. His 18-year-old son becomes Henry VIII and soon announces that he will marry his brother's widow Catherine of Aragon, a move aimed at reaffirming Anglo-Spanish ties

1509

25 June

Two days after his coronation, **Henry VIII arrests two of his father's ministers, Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley**. Charged with high treason, they are both beheaded the following year, two of many such executions of Henry's opponents

1533

23 May

The archbishop of Canterbury, **Thomas Cranmer**, declares **Henry's marriage to Catherine to be null and void**. Five days later, Cranmer validates the marriage between Henry and Anne Boleyn, which occurred four months previously

1533

November

**Thomas Cromwell**, protégé of the disgraced Cardinal Wolsey, makes his appearance at **Henry VIII's court**. He enjoys a meteoric rise, dominating all of the king's business for the next decade, notably the Reformation

1529

18 February

**Princess Mary is born**, the only child of Henry and Catherine to survive beyond the age of two months

1516

10 September

**Thomas Wolsey** (right) is appointed as **Lord Chancellor**, making him Henry VIII's chief adviser and, effectively, the second most powerful man in the country. By 1529, he falls out of favour after failing to get Rome's approval for the annulment of Henry and Catherine's marriage

1515



6 July

Edward VI dies at the age of just 15, thought by many to be the victim of tuberculosis. On his deathbed, he names his cousin **Lady Jane Grey** as his successor rather than either of his half-sisters, Mary and Elizabeth. On **19 July, Jane is deposed by Mary** who swiftly imprisons several key figures behind Jane's ascent to the throne, including Thomas Cranmer, the influential archbishop of Canterbury

1554

18 March

Eager to restore Catholicism to the country, **Mary** (right) imprisons her half-sister **Elizabeth** whom she believes to have been part of a Protestant plot to seize the crown. Elizabeth is held for two months in the Tower of London



1555

4 February

A clergyman called John Rogers is burned at the stake, the first of around 300 such executions of **Protestants** during the Marian Persecutions. By ordering the deaths, the queen becomes known as 'Bloody Mary'

1558

17 November

**Mary dies at the age of 42**. With no children from her marriage to Philip of Spain, she accepts that her half-sister Elizabeth (left) will succeed her, despite the princess's advocacy of Protestantism. The following April, the Act of Uniformity is passed, meaning **Protestantism becomes the official faith of England**



16 May

Mary, the recently abdicated Queen of Scots, travels to England, hoping Elizabeth will help her regain the Scottish crown. But the queen is suspicious of the intentions of the devoutly Catholic Mary and places her in custody for more than 18 years

1568



26 April

The future playwright and poet **William Shakespeare** (left) is baptised in Stratford-upon-Avon. By the early 1590s, his first plays are being performed on London stages; in 1599, his company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, builds the Globe Theatre

1564



## The dawn of the Tudors







# The dawn of the Tudors

A scandalous affair, numerous bloody battles and a lengthy exile mark the origins of the house of Tudor.

**Chris Skidmore** charts the rise of the new dynasty

The battle of Bosworth, as depicted by Philip James de Loutherbourg in David Hume's *The History of England*



## The dawn of the Tudors

West Wales, 7 August 1485. As the sun lowered beneath the horizon across the Milford estuary, a flotilla of ships drifted across the mouth of the Haven. It had been a week since the fleet had sailed from the shelter of the Seine at Honfleur, but the ships had made fast progress in the balmy August weather. Onboard, the soldiers waited. They included a rabble of 2,000 Breton and French soldiers (many only recently released from prison and, according to the chronicler Commynes, "the worst sort... raised out of the refuse of the people"). There were also a thousand Scottish troops and 400 Englishmen, whose last sight of the country had been two years previously, when they had fled in fear of their lives.

The ships entered the mouth of the estuary where, looking leftwards, the dark red sandstone cliffs, several hundred feet in height and impossible to scale, gave way to a small cove hidden from sight from the cliffs above. High tide had passed an hour previously, enabling the ships to creep silently to the edge of the narrow shoreline, allowing the troops to disembark. Their arrival stirred no one.

From one of the boats stepped a 28-year-old man. Pale and slender, above average height with shoulder-length brown hair, he had a long face with a red wart just above his chin. Yet his most noticeable feature to those who met him was his small blue eyes, which gave out the impression of energy and liveliness whenever he spoke.

Stepping from his boat, the man took a few steps forward on land upon which he had last set foot 14 years before. Kneeling down in the sand, he took his finger and drew a sign of the cross, which he then kissed. Then, holding up his hands to the skies, he uttered words from the first line from the 43rd Psalm: "Judge and revenge my cause O Lord," which the soldiers now began to sing. As the words of the psalm echoed around Mill Bay in the darkening evening, one line in particular must have stood out above all others: "O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man."

### Moment of reckoning

The journey across Wales to win a kingdom had only just begun. For Henry Tudor, his arrival to claim the crown of England was the end of a journey that had lasted his whole life.

The remarkable rise of the Tudors to prominence is shrouded in fable. Long

before Henry Tudor's landing in 1485, the family had nearly driven itself into annihilation due to their support of Owain Glyndwr's disastrous rebellion in 1400. It would take a scandalous affair to trigger a turnaround in the Tudors' fortunes.

Owen Tudor was a household servant in Henry V's court. After the king's premature death, his widowed queen, Katherine of Valois, took a shine to the handsome Welsh page, supposedly after he had drunkenly fallen into her lap dancing at a ball. Their illicit union, later formalised by a secret marriage, produced several children, including Edmund and Jasper Tudor, recognised by Henry VI as his half-brothers when he created them the earls of Richmond and Pembroke.

Edmund had his own ambitions for self-enrichment: his means would be marriage, namely to the wealthiest heiress in the land, Margaret Beaufort, the sole inheritor of the Beaufort family fortune, who had her own claim to the throne. Margaret was just a child, but when it came to marriage, land took precedence over love for Edmund. Aged just 12, Margaret found herself pregnant. Edmund, however, would not live to see the birth of his heir.

Although Edmund Tudor is reported to have died of the plague, this obscures the fact that he had been recently arrested by adherents of the king's rival, Richard, Duke of York; his treatment in prison, many suspected, hastened his death. Already divisions between the houses of Lancaster and York had been exposed to full glare at the first battle of St Albans in 1455, where Jasper Tudor himself witnessed the Lancastrian king Henry VI being injured in the fight.

With Edmund's death, Jasper Tudor would assume the mantle of the head of the family. He had Margaret swiftly married to Henry Stafford, the second son of the wealthy Duke of Buckingham. But any newfound stability was to be short-lived. Despite an attempt at reconciliation, factionalism between the Lancastrian court and York's supporters erupted into open warfare in the late 1450s and into 1460, when the Yorkists secured a crushing victory at Northampton, capturing Henry VI. York was declared Henry's successor, only for a dramatic reversal in fortune when the duke was executed after the battle of Wakefield in December 1460. York's son and heir, Edward, Earl of March, wreaked his revenge two months

Edward IV crushed the Lancastrians at the battle of Towton. It was the largest battle to be fought on English soil with approximately 20,000 men dying

**"Vengeance would be a long time coming. Edward's victory at the battle of Towton heralded a decade of Yorkist rule as he acceded to the throne"**

later when, at the battle of Mortimer's Cross in early 1461, he routed the Lancastrian forces, killing 3,000 Welshmen. One of the victims was an elderly Owen Tudor, who was executed at the market cross in Hereford, his last words reportedly being "That head shall lie on the stock that was wont to lie on Queen Katherine's lap". Jasper was forced to flee, promising to avenge his father's death "with the might of the Lord."

Vengeance would be a long time coming. Edward's crushing victory at the battle of Towton a month later heralded a decade of Yorkist rule, as Edward acceded to the throne as Edward IV. In exile first in Wales and later France, Jasper was stripped of his earldom, while his young nephew Henry was placed in the charge of the new Earl of Pembroke, William Herbert, where he was brought up at Raglan Castle, under the care of Herbert's wife, Anne. His mother, Margaret, paid occasional visits to her son. However, mother and son weren't reunited







Illustration by  
the King's College



## The dawn of the Tudors

until 1470, when the defection of Warwick 'the Kingmaker' forced Edward IV from power and returned Henry VI to the throne

Jasper was restored to his earldom and given extensive powers under the restored Lancastrian regime, but it was not to last. In March 1471, Edward IV launched a remarkable comeback, returning from exile in Holland. Within the space of a month, two critical battles at Barnet and Tewkesbury resulted in the deaths of Warwick, Margaret Beaufort's husband Stafford and Henry VI's son Prince Edward, shortly followed by Henry VI's own suspicious end in the Tower. Through the brutality of war, Henry Tudor was rapidly becoming one of the last remaining members of the royal family, although his claim to the throne was hardly taken seriously at the time.

### Blown off course

After the crushing defeat of the Lancastrian forces, Jasper had no choice but to flee into exile again, taking 14-year-old Henry with him. Sailing in a small boat bound for French shores, he hoped to enlist the support of Louis XI. Yet when a storm blew them off course, they found themselves on the shores of Le Conquet in neighbouring Brittany. At the time, Brittany was an independent duchy separate to France and relations between the two were hostile

The Breton ruler, Duke Francis II, recognising the value of the Tudors as diplomatic pawns, welcomed Jasper and Henry to his court. Francis understood

that these new arrivals could be used to bargain with Edward IV, who was desperate to have both returned to England. He remained determined to keep both under close supervision, separating uncle and nephew, with Henry sent to the isolated Tour d'Elven. His exile in Brittany over the next 14 years would be spent as a prisoner, albeit with household expenses totalling £2,000.

Edward IV made repeated failed attempts to entice Francis to hand over the Tudors. In 1476, he persuaded the duke that he intended for Henry to marry his daughter Elizabeth and requested his return. Francis fell for the trap and Henry was taken to St Malo, ready to be boarded onto a ship to transport him back to England. But Henry feigned illness and managed to escape into the town.

Edward IV's death in April 1483 marked a turning point in Henry's fortunes. Following the mysterious disappearance of Edward V and his brother in the summer of 1483, together with Richard III's seizing of the crown, a massive rebellion led by the Duke of Buckingham broke out in October 1483. Spurred on by his mother, Margaret Beaufort, who appears to have been strongly involved with the organisation of the rebellion, Henry decided to sail to the English coast with a fleet of Breton ships in the hope of invading. But the rebellion collapsed and, with Buckingham's execution, Henry had no option but to return to Brittany.

### Silver linings

Henry's aborted attempt to claim the crown may have ended in disaster, but its consequences were to prove highly advantageous. Hundreds of exiles fleeing from England soon arrived at Henry's 'court', many of whom were former household men of Edward IV, distraught at Richard's usurpation. They had now switched sides to back Lancastrian Henry Tudor. Henry also pledged an oath on Christmas Day 1483 to marry Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's eldest daughter, uniting the houses of Lancaster and York.

But Henry's time in Brittany was soon to be cut short as Richard offered to provide a force of several thousand archers to aid Brittany in their conflict with France, in return Henry and Jasper were to be arrested. Henry was tipped off about the plan with just hours to spare and managed to flee to France where he was received by the French court of Charles VIII. As a pawn in the diplomatic chessboard, Henry's arrival was a gift for the French regime, who agreed to equip Henry with



money, ships and mercenaries "of the worst sort" to launch an attack on Richard. At the last moment, though, they held back on their promises of funding, forcing Henry to borrow from brokers in Paris. He set sail with his army on 1 August 1485.

Richard III was reportedly "overjoyed" at news of Henry's landing. Yet, as Henry's march along the coastline of Wales went unhindered, Richard grew nervous, becoming suspicious of the involvement of Henry's step-father, Thomas Stanley (Margaret Beaufort's third husband), and his brother Sir William Stanley in the lack of resistance to Henry's growing band of men as he travelled through north Wales and to the gates of Shrewsbury. The key defections of Welsh landowner Sir Rhys ap Thomas and Sir Gilbert Talbot provided Henry with the momentum he needed to push forward towards London.

Richard had spent the summer at Nottingham, waiting to see where Henry might land, but now he hurried to Leicester where he amassed a force of some 15,000 men – at the time, one of the largest armies ever assembled on one side. On 21 August, both armies camped overlooking the marshy terrain known as 'Redemore' near the villages of Dadlington and Upton.

Still, Henry could not be sure of the Stanleys' final support at Bosworth. Suspecting treachery, Richard had kept Thomas Stanley's son, George Lord Strange, imprisoned as a hostage. Henry held a clandestine meeting with both



Richard III and his impressive army looked set for victory at Bosworth but Sir William Stanley's last-minute intervention meant it was not to be





The room in which Richard III reportedly spent his last few nights. It's said the king suffered from nightmares before the battle of Bosworth

**"With Henry fearing an imminent death, the sudden charge of Sir William Stanley's men saw Richard III swept into a nearby marsh"**

brothers the night before, and when morning came, Stanley refused to march his forces into line, remaining upon the brow of the surrounding hills, between both armies.

As both sides lined up for battle in the early hours of 22 August, it was clear that Richard's army was vastly superior, with his "countless multitude" of men. In contrast, Henry had at best 5,000 men, of which his French mercenaries had to be kept apart from his native soldiers, for fear of them falling out.

Henry's vanguard was led by the Earl of Oxford, the Lancastrian commander who had managed to escape imprisonment to join Henry in France. Oxford's expertise saw Richard's vanguard routed and the death of its commander, the Duke of Norfolk. By now, Richard had begun to realise that many on his own side, particularly those led by the Earl of Northumberland in his rearguard, were refusing to fight. He was offered the chance to flee yet preferred to fight to the death.

Spotting Henry at the back of the battlefield, Richard charged on horseback towards its ranks. After unhorsing Sir John

Cheney, at 6ft 8ins one of the tallest soldiers of the day, Richard's men managed to kill Henry's standard-bearer, Sir William Brandon, while Richard's own standard-bearer, Sir Percival Thirlwall, had both his legs hacked away beneath him.

With Henry fearing imminent death, the sudden charge of Sir William Stanley's 3,000 men saw Richard swept into a nearby marsh, where he was killed as the blows of the halberds of Henry's Welsh troops rained down on him. We now know that the king suffered massive trauma to the head, including one wound which cut clean through the skull and into his brain. After two bloody hours the battle was over: on the nearby 'Crown Hill', Henry was proclaimed king by Thomas Stanley.

Two months later, Henry was officially crowned Henry VII at Westminster Abbey. The following January, he married Elizabeth of York. After decades of uncertainty and exile, the Tudor dynasty was finally born. **II**

Chris Skidmore is a historian, MP for Kingswood and author of *Bosworth: The Birth of the Tudors* (W&N, 2013)

## Three notable figures in Henry VII's success

Without the help of these three people, Henry Tudor may not have become king at all

### Jasper Tudor

The loyal uncle of Henry Tudor. The second son of Owen Tudor, Jasper found himself embroiled in the civil wars as he defended his half-brother Henry VI. When Henry lost the throne, Jasper went into exile, taking his nephew with him. He remained a constant presence in Henry Tudor's life, his loyalty rewarded after the battle of Bosworth with the dukedom of Bedford.



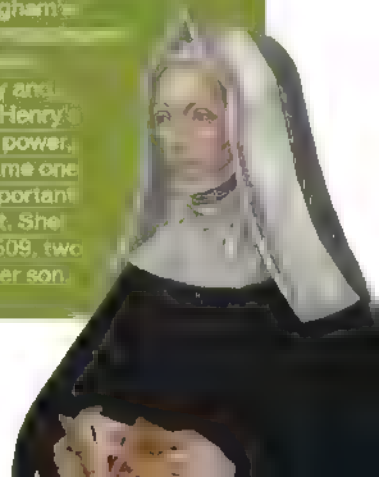
### John de Vere, Earl of Oxford

A stalwart Lancastrian, whose father and brother had been executed by the Yorkists, the Earl of Oxford came to prominence at the battle of Barnet in 1471 when, on the cusp of victory, his troops were defeated by Edward IV after they became confused in the mist and began attacking their own side. Oxford fled, only to reappear three years later when he seized St Michael's Mount. In 1484, he joined Henry in exile in France. Making the journey to Bosworth, Oxford was placed in command of Henry's vanguard. His military knowledge—particularly manoeuvring his troops to ensure that the sun and the wind were against Richard's forces—may have proved critical in winning the battle.

### Margaret Beaufort

Henry Tudor's "dearest and most entirely beloved mother". Margaret was barely a teenager when she gave birth to her only son. Suspected to be one of the driving forces behind Buckingham's

sending money and support. After Henry's assumption of power, Margaret became one of the most important figures at court. She died in June 1509, two months after her son.





1485-1509

# HENRY VII

## THE STABILISER





## He may not be the most well-known Tudor but, says **Steven Gunn**, Henry VII laid the foundations to make England a global power

**H**enry VII is the inscrutable Tudor. Less charismatic than Henry VIII or Elizabeth, less tragic than Edward or Mary, he stands no chance in a Most Famous Tudor competition. But that is no reason to forget him.

We should admire Henry first for his tenacity. When he was propelled from exile to the English throne in 1485 after the battle of Bosworth, six of the previous nine English kings had been deposed. And the average was getting worse: each of the four before him had lost the crown – one of them, the hapless Henry VI, twice.

One-quarter French, one-quarter Welsh, one-quarter descended from John of Gaunt by his mistress, Henry's claim to the throne of England was hardly compelling. Yet he defeated numerous pretenders – Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck, Edmund de la Pole – and clung onto power. He healed old divisions by marrying Edward's daughter, Elizabeth of York – a match symbolised by the red and white Tudor rose – and breeding sons to succeed him. And even when two sons out of three died, he saw Henry VIII safely onto the throne – the first king to pass on the crown successfully to his son in nearly a century.

### No laughing matter

Henry was not just a survivor but also a stabiliser. He was less trusting, less generous and less relaxed than many of his subjects might have liked: he is recorded as laughing in public only once. He put more faith in those he had seen tested in the crises of 1483–89 than in young noblemen who thought they ought to govern because of their titles and blood. He took more advice than previous kings from lawyers and financial administrators, men who told him what the crown's powers were and how he might use them to tighten his grip on the kingdom. He used fines for disobedience or

for offences against his rights as a means of political control. His richer subjects did not like it, but losing your money to Henry VII was better than losing your head to his son.

He strengthened the crown both financially and in its ability to do justice. Henry expanded the crown's lands, drove up the customs by encouraging trade and attacking smuggling, and began to reform the taxes voted by parliament in time of war, tapping economic growth without retarding it, in a way many governments might envy.

The demands of the royal conscience and those of troubled subjects combined to make justice a key to good kingship. Henry offered his people faster decisions in their lawsuits at the centre, through the expanding judicial activity of the king's council, which would develop into the courts of Star Chamber and Requests.

He did the same in regions far from Westminster, with revived councils to oversee Wales and the north. In the counties, justices of the peace were more numerous and better supervised. In small towns and villages the urge for stability coming up from below – stirred by patchy population growth, industrial development and the mobile, restless youth that came with them – met the determination to enforce order coming down from the king and his councillors.

Henry's achievements may not be as spectacular as those of his son and grandchildren, but he laid the foundations for every aspect of later Tudor rule. The calculated magnificence of Richmond Palace and his chapel at Westminster paved the way for Hampton Court and Nonsuch Palace.

He spread the family badges that would brand English kingship for the next century, and which survive to mark coins, tourist-board signs and parliamentary buildings to the present day. His patronage both of church reformers like Bishop John Fisher and the Franciscan Observants,

and of lawyers who attacked the church's jurisdiction and skimmed off its wealth, foreshadowed the mix of piety and power-play in the coming Reformation. His use of parliament to address problems in government and society prepared it for its role in the bigger changes ahead.

His low-born but talented ministers – Reynold Bray, Thomas Lovell, Richard Empson, Edmund Dudley – were the forerunners of the meritocratic statesmen to come. He tied his family by marriage into the network of European dynasties, had his say in the politics of Italy, France and the Netherlands, and pursued alliances that favoured English trade – above all, the cloth exports on which so many jobs depended.

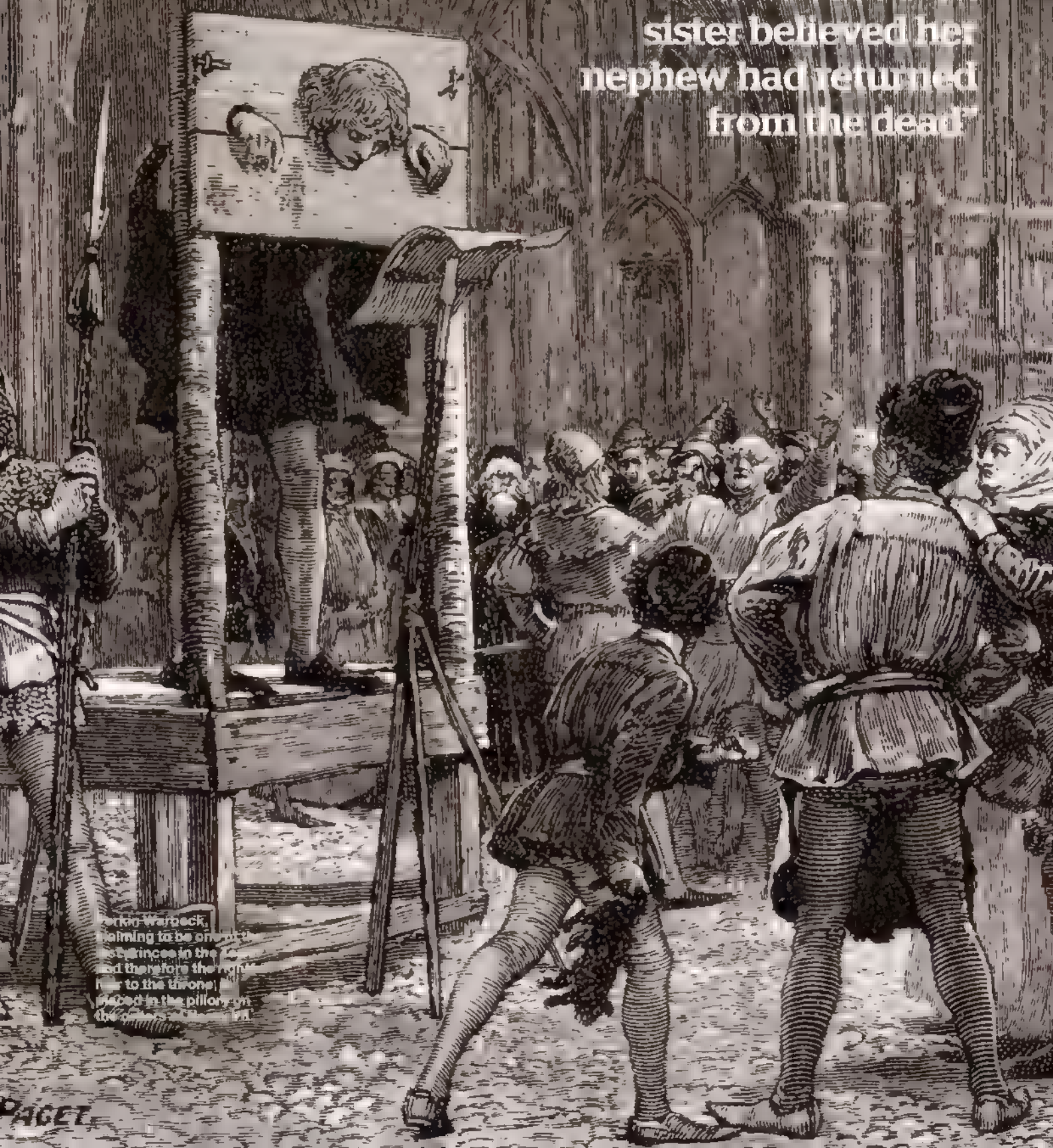
It is a gross simplification to say that the Middle Ages ended with Henry's reign, but we should not lose sight of the changes afoot. Henry's government first made widespread use of printing, first welcomed Italian Renaissance artists and gave the heirs to the throne a classical education, and first sent permanent diplomatic representatives to multiple foreign courts. His was the first administration to establish the navy as a permanent arm of the state, the first to legislate against enclosure to defend the common people at a time of economic change, and the first to patronise voyages of discovery to claim England's place among the global empires.

Henry made the first secure peace with France after the Hundred Years' War, and the first secure peace with the Scots after the Scottish Wars of Independence. The marriage alliance by which his daughter Margaret married James IV of Scots would lead to the union of the crowns a century later in the person of his great-great-grandson James VI and I, and beyond that to the making of the United Kingdom. How's that for a long-term achievement? **II**

**Steven Gunn** is professor of early modern history at Merton College, Oxford



"The impostor was so convincing that Richard II's own sister believed her nephew had returned from the dead."



Richard Warbeck, claiming to be one of the lost princes in the Tower and therefore the rightful heir to the throne, was placed in the pillory on the orders of Henry VII.



# THE SECRET WAR AGAINST THE TUDORS

Despite his victory at Bosworth, Henry VII's seat on the English throne was far from secure. **Desmond Seward** reveals the pretenders who tried to take his place

In the early hours of 27 May 1541, Margaret, Countess of Salisbury – over 70 years of age and the only surviving Plantagenet – was awoken at the Tower of London and told she was to die at 7am. “When informed of her sentence, she found it very strange, not knowing her crime,” reported Eustace Chapuys, the ambassador to England of the Holy Roman Emperor, “but she walked to a place in front of the Tower where there was no scaffold but only a small block.” The executioner’s place was taken by a inexperienced young man, who hacked her head and shoulders to pieces. Only Margaret’s rank saved her from being burned alive.

Why was Margaret killed? Chapuys says that she and her son Lord Montague were executed because they were “the last

of the White Rose faction”. The White Rose was the symbol of the House of York, which vied for the crown against the red-rosed House of Lancaster during the Wars of the Roses. Both families were members of the Plantagenet dynasty who had ruled England since the 12th century. It is commonly said that these wars ended with Richard III’s death at Bosworth Field in 1485, after which the victorious Henry Tudor became King Henry VII. Yet the execution of the Countess of Salisbury shows that the Tudors still felt threatened, and that it is wrong to assume the inevitability of their rule.

For decades, this new, self-invented royal family was challenged by pretenders

with Plantagenet blood. And it only survived because of a sophisticated spy network and a ruthless use of legal murder. The impact of plot after plot against Henry VII – and, subsequently, Henry VIII – on both kingly behaviour and policies has never, until now, been properly investigated.

Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, was beheaded in 1541 for being a Plantagenet





### HENRY VII TIMELINE

**22 August 1485**

Henry Tudor defeats Richard III at the battle of Bosworth ending the Wars of the Roses. He becomes King Henry VII

**18 January 1486**

Henry VII marries Elizabeth of York, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster. Their first son, Arthur, is born just eight months later

**16 June 1487**

Henry crushes a revolt by the Earl of Lincoln at the battle of Stoke Field. The rebels are acting on behalf of Lambert Simnel, a pretender to the throne who claims to be the Earl of Warwick

**3 November 1492**

Henry invades France, but France is more interested in reaching a settlement. English troops withdraw following the Treaty of Etaples, which stipulates that the French do not support any Yorkists

**23 November 1493**

Perkin Warbeck is hanged after an attempt to overthrow Henry. He is an impostor claiming to be Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, one of the Princes in the Tower who disappeared once Richard III had taken the throne

**14 November 1501**

Henry's eldest son, Prince Arthur, marries Catherine of Aragon, but dies the following April, leaving his younger brother Henry heir to the throne. A papal dispensation is then obtained, allowing Henry to marry Catherine

**11 February 1503**

Elizabeth of York dies nine days after giving birth to a daughter, Katherine, who only survived a few days

**8 August 1503**

Margaret, Henry's daughter, marries James IV of Scotland. The marriage gives James' Scottish descendants a claim to the English throne

**21 April 1509**

Henry dies at Richmond Palace, aged 52. After his wife's death he became very ill and was only visited by his mother



While the last male Plantagenet, the young Earl of Warwick (Richard III's nephew and legal heir), was alive there could be no real security for Henry Tudor. In 1486, the Yorkists Lord Lovell and Sir Humphrey Stafford raised an ineffectual revolt in Warwick's name in Yorkshire and the Midlands. The following year, the Earl of Lincoln and Lord Lovell led a much more serious rising and, although Lincoln was defeated and killed at the battle of Stoke Field in Nottinghamshire, the result could easily have gone the other way.

#### A foreign pretender

Yet it was not just Warwick who caused problems for Henry Tudor. Henry's great adversary, Richard III, had taken the throne from his brother's own children. While Richard was on the throne, Edward IV's son and heir, Edward V, and his younger brother, Richard, Duke of York, disappeared in mysterious circumstances in the Tower of London. Though it was widely assumed that Richard had ordered the princes to be murdered, Henry VII was, throughout the 1490s, threatened by a man who impersonated the younger prince. The impostor, Perkin Warbeck from Hainault (now part of Belgium), was so convincing that Richard III's own sister, Margaret of Burgundy, believed her nephew had

returned from the dead. Indeed, the chronicler Hall said she thought she had "gotten God by the foot when she had the Devil by the tail".

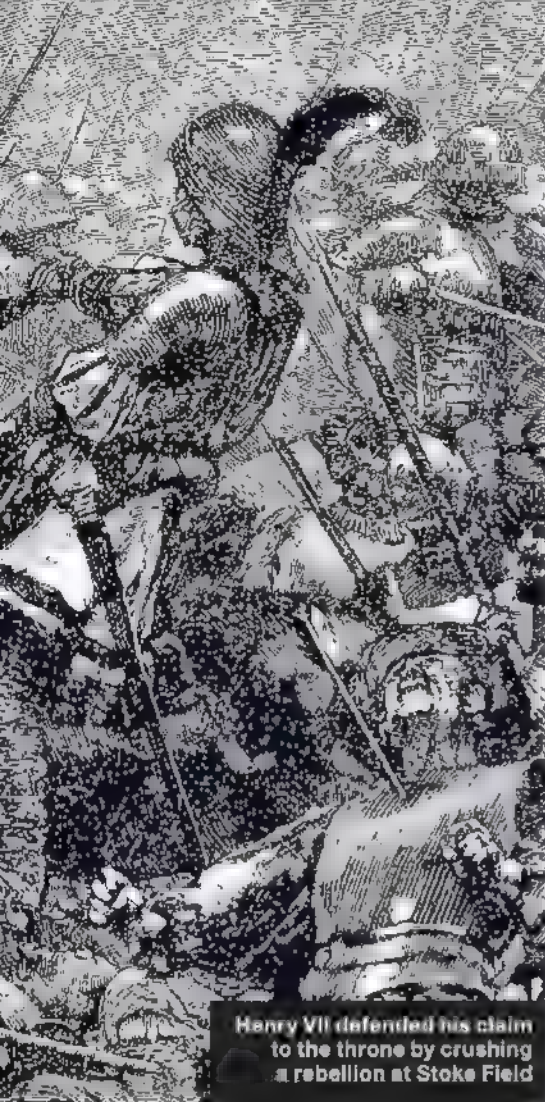
Aided in turn by Charles VIII of France, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and James IV of Scotland, Warbeck was supported by a powerful Yorkist underground that included the Lord Chamberlain, Sir William Stanley. Even so, Warbeck's formidable backers could not prevent him from being caught and imprisoned in the Tower, along with the Earl of Warwick. Henry had the pair executed in 1499. This may have rid him of a grave threat but, in the eyes of many, it brought down a curse upon the Tudors: none of their sons, it was claimed, would reach manhood.

Ironically, it was a far more trivial incident that finally pushed the king towards a nervous collapse. Just before Warwick died, a lunatic appeared on the scene, claiming to be the doomed earl. According to the Spanish ambassador, within a fortnight of learning of the new impostor, Henry looked 20 years older.

#### Constant threat

Then, in 1501, a new White Rose emerged to challenge Henry. This time it was another nephew of Richard III — Edmund





Henry VII defended his claim to the throne by crushing a rebellion at Stoke Field

de la Pole, the Earl of Suffolk – whom Hall described as “stout and bold of courage, and of wit rash and heady”. De la Pole fled to Austria where Emperor Maximilian promised to help him gain the crown. Henry VII became obsessed with de la Pole, spending vast sums on trying to catch him before he was handed over in 1506 and incarcerated in the Tower.

These almost constant plots not only distracted Henry from his attempts to establish his dynasty, but also took their toll on the king's health. By the time he died in 1509, Henry was so unbalanced that he even kept his own son under surveillance. And when that son – Henry VIII – came to the throne, he too found his position under threat from loyalist supporters of both the House of York and the pope. His methods, such as the hurried execution of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, were unforgiving, punishing those deemed guilty of “in the words of chief minister Thomas Cromwell – “treasons, conspiracies and practices” while planning “the destruction of the king”. More than half a century after Bosworth, the House of Tudor was still having to watch its back. **III**

Desmond Seward is author of *The Last White Rose: Dynasty, Rebellion and Treason – The Secret Wars Against the Tudors* (Constable, 2011)

## TOP OF THE PLOTS

threat of plots to unseat him. Here are the three main conspirators who tried to claim the throne for the House of York

### LORD LINCOLN

**His Mission:** To put Lambert Simnel on the throne

before it rallied and annihilated them, Lincoln was killed, it was

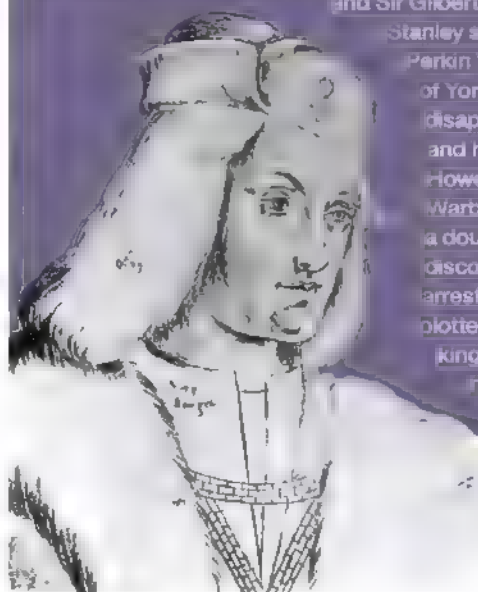
Threat level:  
**SEVERE**

### SIR WILLIAM STANLEY

**His Mission:** To stab his old comrade in arms, Henry VII, in the back

and Sir Gilbert Debenham, knight of the King's Body. Stanley supported the invasion of the impostor, Perkin Warbeck, believing him to be the Duke of York (one of the two princes who had disappeared in the Tower of London). He and his allies planned to murder Henry VII. However, since 1493 their contact with Warbeck had been Sir Robert Clifford – a double agent. Thanks to Clifford, Henry discovered everything and had Stanley arrested and executed with his fellow plotters in January 1495. The king had been saved by his spy network.

Threat level:  
**SEVERE**



Perkin Warbeck was a pretender to the English throne who claimed to be the younger son of Edward IV



# THE PERFECT QUEEN

History books may focus on her successors but Elizabeth of York, Henry VII's unassuming wife, remains one of England's most eminent queens, argues **Alison Weir**







Henry VIII's close relationship to his mother was well known. In a richly illuminated manuscript, the *Vaux Passional*, in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, there is an illumination featuring King Henry VII being presented with a book. Behind the throne can be seen an empty black-draped bed, and kneeling beside it is a boy in a green tunic, his red-haired head buried in his arms. Almost certainly this image portrays the young Henry VIII weeping for his mother, Elizabeth of York, who died in 1503 when he was 11.

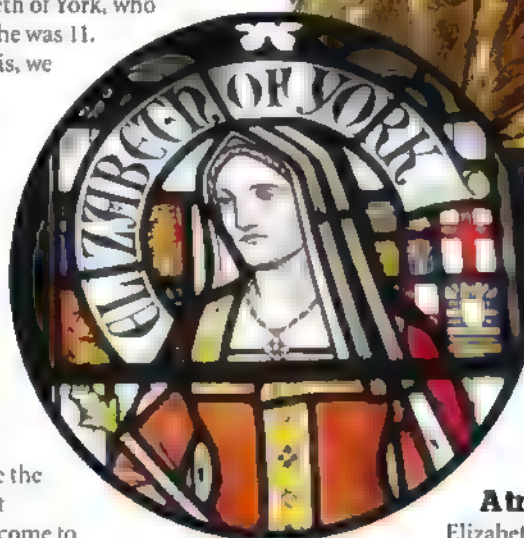
In addition to this, we have his own testimony to his grief at her loss: four years later, in a letter about the untimely demise of Philip I of Castile – whom Henry had grown to admire when the two met in England in 1506 – the young prince wrote: "Never since the death of my dearest mother hath there come to me more hateful intelligence. It seemed to tear open the wound to which time had brought insensibility."

Elizabeth of York played an important role in the Wars of the Roses and the early Tudor story. Born in 1466, she was the eldest daughter of the Yorkist king Edward IV, sister of the princes in the Tower, and niece of Richard III, who had her and her siblings declared bastards so that he could claim the throne.

The probable murder of her brothers in the Tower of London in 1483 meant that, in the eyes of many, Elizabeth was the rightful queen of England. Richard III himself contemplated marrying her, but in 1485 Henry Tudor, who claimed to be the heir to the House of Lancaster and had sworn to marry Elizabeth, came from France with an army and defeated Richard at the battle of Bosworth. Thus was founded the Tudor dynasty. The marriage of King Henry VII and Elizabeth of York was hugely popular, for the union of the white rose of York and the red rose



ABOVE: The marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York in 1486 LEFT: Elizabeth of York, depicted in a stained-glass window at Cardiff Castle



of Lancaster was seen as bringing peace after years of dynastic war.

### A true bond

Elizabeth was intelligent and beautiful. A Venetian report described her as "a very handsome woman of great ability, and in conduct very able", beloved for her abundant "charity and humanity". The humanist scholar Erasmus described her in one word: "brilliant".

That there was affection and tenderness between Henry and Elizabeth cannot be doubted. A Spanish envoy claimed in 1498 that Elizabeth "suffered under great oppression and led a miserable, cheerless life". Yet there are many instances of the king showing genuine concern for her health and her happiness, and on this isolated occasion Elizabeth probably appeared subdued because she was newly pregnant and unwell.

In 1613, Sir Francis Bacon asserted that Henry VII was "nothing uxorious, nor scarce indulgent" and "showed himself no very indulgent husband, though she was beautiful, gentle and fruitful". But there is little else to support his damning assessment of the marriage. The couple's

early years together may have been challenging, for Henry had to overcome his suspicions of his Yorkist bride. Yet she was to leave him in no doubt as to where her loyalties lay.

As time passed, Henry clearly grew to love, trust and respect Elizabeth, and they seem to have become emotionally close. There survives good evidence that she loved him, including a moving account of how they comforted each other when their eldest son, Arthur, died.

Kings were not expected to share government with their queens or to rely on their advice; they certainly were not supposed to be influenced by them in political matters. Instances of Elizabeth using her influence probably went largely unrecorded, due to her intimate relationship with the king. It was accepted that she might be privy to matters of state, but contemporary advice – which she might have read – urged that her "wisdom ought to appear in speaking, that is to wit that she be secret and tell not such things as ought to be holden secret". There are instances of Henry paying heed to her concerns, but it was not in his nature to be swayed by her.

Elizabeth performed her queenly role to perfection, understanding what was required of her and conforming seemingly effortlessly to the late-medieval ideal of queenship, which constrained her to a role



# “Henry clearly grew to love, trust and respect Elizabeth, and they seem to have become emotionally close”

that was decorous, symbolic and dynastic. She was beautiful, devout, fertile and kind – the traditional good queen.

In the past, historians tended to compare her favourably to Margaret of Anjou, that “great and strong laboured woman”. Yet today, in the wake of a revolution in women’s liberation, it is the proactive Margaret, vigorously fighting her husband Henry VI’s cause, who earns admiration, rather than the passive Elizabeth.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, however, queens were not expected to do very much beyond exemplifying the humane, feminine side of monarchy – being charming to foreign ambassadors, or winning popularity by their charities, their gifts to the poor, their pilgrimages and their pious example. Getting involved in politics and wars were steps too far.

Unlike Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth never identified herself with factions at court; unlike her mother, Elizabeth Woodville, she did not promote a horde of ambitious relatives. Once she achieved her ambition to be queen, she interested herself chiefly in affairs that were her legitimate concerns: her household, her estates, her court and her children.

## An unobtrusive influence

But Elizabeth’s Plantagenet blood and her superior claim to the throne placed her in a difficult position, especially when Yorkist pretenders emerged to contest Henry VII’s throne. How she rose to these challenges we do not know, yet we can surely infer, from the emerging harmony of her married life, that she took care never to be controversial and always to place her husband’s interests first.

From time to time the king *did* involve her in diplomatic relations, mainly in helping to arrange their children’s marriages – a task that queens were traditionally expected to perform. It is often said that, apart from this role, Henry allowed Elizabeth no power at all. But, evidently, it was known that she exercised a gentle, unobtrusive influence on him, as is evidenced by the endless stream of gifts to her from powerful persons who clearly believed that her patronage was worth having.

There are instances of her exercising authority independently of her husband, intervening in matters of law, and petitioning him on behalf of others. When

one of her Welsh tenants complained of the heavy-handedness of Henry’s uncle, Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke, she did not refer the matter to the king but sent a sharp reproof to Pembroke herself, which apparently achieved the desired result.

In another letter Elizabeth rebuked John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, regarding the disputed ownership of a manor. Here we see her being firm, fair and concerned to right a wrong, and her influence must have been known to be effective, or Simon Bryant would not have judged it worth appealing to her for help.

In February 1502, Elizabeth’s brother-in-law William Courtenay was imprisoned in the Tower on a charge of treason. Her accounts show that, a month beforehand, she had taken into her charge his young children, whom she would now support with their mother, her sister Katherine. This suggests that Henry VII had come to rely on Elizabeth so absolutely that he confided his intentions to her, entrusting her with state secrets.

Elizabeth’s legacy to the Tudor dynasty was her Plantagenet blood, which compensated for any deficiency in Henry VII’s descent. Her goodness shines forth in the records; she was greatly loved – and deservedly so. Certainly, the sources show that she deserves a lot more credit for her political accomplishments than most historians have been prepared to give her. It is also clear that, far from living in subjection to Henry VII and his mother, Margaret Beaufort, she enjoyed a good relationship with both.

Elizabeth is often overshadowed by her successors, the multiple wives of Henry VIII, but she was a more successful queen than any of them. For this, and for her integrity and her sweet, good nature, her memory deserves to be celebrated. ■

**Alison Weir** is Britain’s bestselling female historian. She is the author of more than 20 books, many of which focus on Tudor queens, including a biography of Elizabeth of York





1509-1547

# HENRY VIII

THE SCOURGE OF PAPAL POWER



Unmistakable: Hans  
Holbein the Younger's  
distinctive portrait of  
Henry VIII, c1536



# Henry VIII

## Henry VIII waged war on all who dared cross him, says **George Bernard**, from the Scots to his wives, but above all, Rome

**H**enry VIII's most striking action and his legacy was his break with Rome. He threw off papal jurisdiction, declared himself supreme head of the church on earth under Christ and denounced the usurpation of the pope and the superstitions of his church.

Of course, in many ways the church in England was already monarchical, with bishops long nominated by the crown from the monarch's circle of counsellors and diplomats. But to proclaim the royal supremacy so boldly, persistently and vigorously was something new.

Henry's daughter Mary reverted to papal obedience during her brief reign. Yet following Mary's death in 1558 her half-sister, Elizabeth, pursued Henry's policy of rejecting the authority of the papacy. Since then the Church of England has remained independent. And that has hugely affected English relations with, and attitudes to, the rulers and peoples of continental Europe. Nothing any other Tudor monarch did mattered as much.

Henry did not just break with Rome. He saw himself as an Old Testament prophet king, called upon by God to purify the church. And in the 1530s the monasteries were dissolved and the practice of pilgrimage – journeys to the sites of shrines of saints – was brought to an end. Both measures had immense consequences. A society with men and women who, at least in principle, turn their face from the world and devote themselves exclusively to the worship of God is qualitatively different from one which has no monks and nuns.

### **Lasting legacy**

Henry was also much involved in the codification of what Christians should believe. Although he had broken from Rome, dissolved monasteries and effectively abolished pilgrimage, he rejected the

Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone and remained devoted to the mass. Henry also authorised the publication and the reading in church of the Bible in English translation, a measure which over time has had immense consequences.

In many ways, Henry's influence proved decisive when it fell to Queen Elizabeth to determine the church of her realm. True, the liturgy would now be in English; but the ambiguities and ambivalences of liturgy and doctrine were not unlike those of the church of Henry's later years, just when Elizabeth was growing up. A Church of England that is, uniquely, no longer Catholic but not Protestant in any full sense, is very much Henry's legacy.

Henry was also a warrior king. In 1513, 1523 and in the mid-1540s he launched invasions of France and continued to claim that he was rightful king of France. Bold in ambition, cautious in practice, he was prepared to spend a fortune – not least the windfall of the dissolved monasteries' lands – on military campaigns that achieved little, both in France and in Scotland. And he left an appalling financial legacy to those who ruled the realm in the minority of his son, Edward.

Henry was a passionate builder. Few monarchs have invested so much in grand palaces and hunting lodges. The hall of Hampton Court, which he largely rebuilt in the early 1530s, testifies to his ambitions. And his extraordinary collection did not merely leave its mark on contemporary architecture. The design of Nonsuch Palace, in which Henry was closely involved, had a huge influence on the great 'prodigy houses' of Elizabethan England, and is reflected in the eclectic style of Wollaton, Hardwick and Kirby halls.

Henry was also much interested in painting, and attracted to England Hans Holbein, one of the greatest artists of the age. Holbein's image of Henry VIII has had an immense impact: no other English king is more recognisable.

And then there are Henry's six wives – a real-life soap opera that writers of fiction would be hard-pressed to surpass. First, Catherine of Aragon, loyal to the end, but repudiated by Henry after he had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn; second, Anne, who three years after her marriage to Henry would be executed for treasonably committing adultery; third, Jane Seymour, dying soon after giving birth to Edward; next, Anne of Cleves, their marriage arranged for diplomatic reasons but annulled as soon as foreign policy allowed – Henry found her physically repellent; then Catherine Howard – much too young, and also destroyed because she had committed adultery; and, finally, a more harmonious marriage to Katherine Parr.

Too often, the popular image of Henry VIII has been of 'Bluff King Hal', affable and pleasure-loving. Yet there was a darker side. Henry was exceptionally skilled in attracting the devoted service of remarkably capable counsellors – Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell. He was very astute at allowing his ministers to take public responsibility for unpopular policies – from taxation to the dissolution of the monasteries. In fact, no other Tudor ruler was as successful in leaving the impression that others were responsible – so much so that many have been deceived into thinking that he was a weak man manipulated by factions. Yet the fact that he repeatedly destroyed his closest advisers, when in his eyes they had served their turn, argues that it was indeed Henry who brought them down.

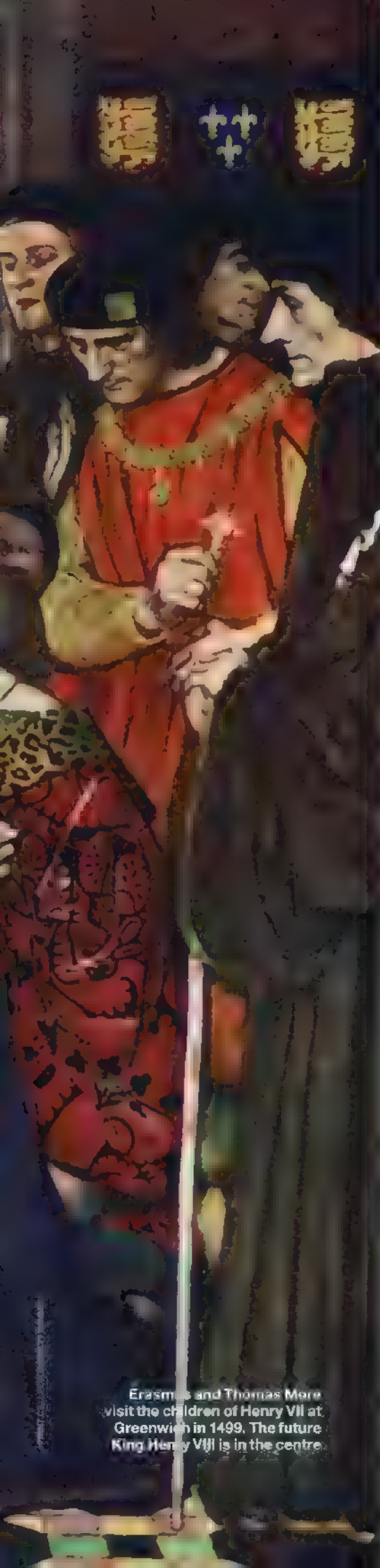
No other Tudor ruler was quite so ruthless when facing opposition as Henry. Far from being a feeble monarch open to exploitation, he was an implacable king who, by the end of the 1530s, had turned into a tyrant. ■

George Bernard is professor of early modern history at the University of Southampton









# THE BOY WHO WOULD BE KING

David Starkey tells **David Musgrove** why the little-known story of Henry VIII's childhood is so integral to his early success as king and his relationship with women

**F**or the wives of Henry VIII, "he was a very considerate husband, until he cut your head off". That may sound like a consummate TV sound bite, but it's one of the main messages that David Starkey tries to get across in his reconsideration of the much-studied Tudor monarch. Starkey believes that Henry's upbringing imbued him with a positive view of women, given that this is the man who famously had six spouses.

You might think that there really can't be much more to say about Henry VIII. Surely we've gleaned all we can from the archives, and all that's left to do is turn over the same hoary old sources searching for new angles to theorise over? Not so, according to Starkey. Historians, he says, have long

believed that very little evidence exists to inform us about the early years of the little prince Henry. That's because they have been looking in the wrong place, by restricting their search to the records of the royal chamber. Academic orthodoxy has it that this is where the centre of royal finance was based, and so that's where we've got our evidence about the life of young Henry. However, historians have forgotten that the royal chamber only took centre stage in 1492 when the boy's father, Henry VII, invaded France.

"Before that, Henry VII had gone back to the old-fashioned exchequer, which continued to be very important right through the 1490s. And all the records of Henry's upbringing, which people didn't think existed, do exist in the exchequer and not in the chamber," says Starkey.

Erasmus and Thomas More visit the children of Henry VII at Greenwich in 1499. The future King Henry VIII is in the centre.



## Henry VIII / The boy

"I have found one of the principal accounts of Henry's christening in this same cache of documents. That's where I've got all this stuff about his upbringing."

So from these "dusty old files" Starkey has been able to unravel the story of Henry VIII's childhood. And he believes those early years, from Henry's birth in 1491 until the death of his elder brother Arthur in 1502, give us a new insight into the king. One of the main themes is that Prince Arthur, as heir to the throne, was brought up on his own away from his brothers and sisters and indeed the royal court, while Henry grew up in an almost exclusively female household with his sisters, his nurses and, most importantly, his mother, Elizabeth of York, for close company.

Says Starkey: "Arthur is never brought up with his mother at all. From infancy, he has got his separate household at Farnham, then it goes somewhere else in the Home Counties. Then, at the age of barely five, he's packed off to Ludlow to become this little prince in the making in a heavily male household. Henry on the other hand is literally in the bosom of his family, with all of these adoring girls and ladies and his mother's ladies around him. His mother probably taught him to read".

Starkey believes we can learn much about the king's psyche from this. "This is where we've got him so badly wrong in his married life," he says. "There are only two reasons why a man marries six times. One is that he doesn't take marriage seriously at all. The other is that he takes it too seriously. He has this extraordinarily modern, wholly unroyal belief that marriage and love are the same thing. I think that's very clearly associated with this feminised upbringing. Henry likes women. Henry is only happy with women around him. We get some extraordinary vignettes of Henry, the old Horrible Henry, of the late 1540s laying on special parties for the women in court. He acts as their own gentleman usher. He welcomes them himself. He takes them to their rooms and arranges their entertainment. This is the side of Henry that we just don't think of."

"It contrasts with Francis I of France, who treats his wives brutally," continues Starkey. "He drags them, heavily pregnant, into the hunting field. Henry just isn't like that. When Catherine of Aragon is pregnant, he's all solicitude. The queen is lodged in the special palace of retreat. The chap even neglects his hunting. What more is a man supposed to do? I would use the word tender: he is a tender husband. When Anne Boleyn comments at her execution about his being a gentle prince, it's not just



This portrait of Henry VIII by an unknown artist shows the king early on in his reign – when connection to the old Yorkist families and his sporting prowess made him incredibly popular among all his subjects

that she's frightened about having a more unpleasant method of execution than having her head chopped off. I think it's reflecting a real truth about Henry, which is conditioned by his upbringing."

As he wasn't brought up to be the king, he had a very different childhood experience from his elder brother, and this, in Starkey's view, made Henry something of an over-indulged mummy's boy.

"I think he was spoilt. This is where we've got the psychology wrong. All previous accounts assume that he was brought up in the shadow of Arthur. Not so at all. He hardly met Arthur. They probably spent no more than two or three months together in the whole of Arthur's life. Even when they were together – we know they were in the summer of 1497 at Woodstock – Arthur was with his father and Henry was with his mother, and the

Italian ambassador was introduced to him separately. Henry therefore was never one step down from Arthur. He was always at the right hand of his mother."

So what would have happened if Arthur had died even earlier than he did, or indeed if he had never been born at all? What sort of Henry would we have seen then? "If Henry had been the eldest son from the beginning, he would have been brought up like Arthur. That raises some very interesting questions. The decision to bring up Arthur in the Marches of Wales turns out to be an extremely bad one. It means that the English political elite don't know him. He is always tucked away in the Marches. Arthur didn't figure on the political radar. Henry VII brings Henry up at his own court. So that means he very quickly becomes a known figure." Thus the decision of Henry's father to keep the



“There’s no better way to **win the hearts** of the English elite, and masses, than being **good at games**. And Henry is brilliant”

young prince at court gave him a presence on the political stage from an early age that put him in a much better place to navigate his path to power. However, it was his mother’s influence once again that was truly instrumental in this regard. To understand why, we need to consider the state of English politics at the time of Henry’s youth.

Henry was born in the embers of the Wars of the Roses, which had pitched the Houses of York and Lancaster at each others’ throats for decades. His father, Henry Tudor, had come to power as the holder of the Lancastrian claim to the throne by defeating Yorkist Richard III at the battle of Bosworth in 1485. This is traditionally seen as the end of the Wars of the Roses, with Henry VII cementing his position by marrying Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the Yorkist king Edward IV. Starkey’s position is that this judgement on the closure of the conflict is a little premature – he sees Henry VII as being faced with a continuous struggle to consolidate his precarious position.

Throughout his reign he had to fend off a still-bullish Yorkist faction, as exemplified by the support given to Perkin Warbeck, a pretender to the throne. The true end of the Wars of the Roses, in Starkey’s eyes, came with the accession of Henry VIII – and his relationship with his mother was the reason why.

“I think that it’s pretty clear that Henry had a genuine affection for his mother. What I think is important to register is that it’s not only a personal affection; it’s a dynastic affection. Henry sees himself as a Yorkist. His upbringing by his mother Elizabeth of York leads him to think of himself as such. It is only Henry with this Yorkist blood, this Yorkist sense of himself, with this closeness to his mother and her place at the heart of the surviving members of the Yorkist royal family, who is able to bring about peace in England. The relationship with the mother is enormously important in terms of the politics.”

At Henry’s coronation in 1509, then, there was much to celebrate. This young prince was in a unique position to mend the dynastic divisions and put England

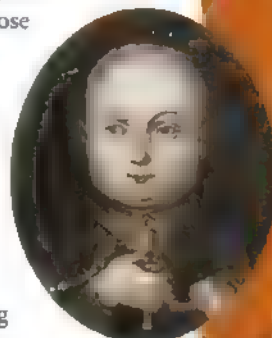
right again. Even better, he was the doyen of his court, whose sporting prowess made him very popular. “The young Henry, unlike Arthur, seems to have been a natural sportsman. There’s no better way to win the hearts of the English elite, or indeed the English masses, than being good at games,” says Starkey.

And he does heal the wounds. Even though his mother had died in 1503, Henry continued to hold the Yorkists’ support and he rewarded them for their loyalty. So after Henry VIII, those old dynastic divisions do indeed die. But in their turn come a new set of rifts, this time focused around religion. Much of this new schism is Henry’s doing.

“The divorce explains why the political settlement of the first part of Henry’s reign is completely ruptured. Henry has the great misfortune that, apart from the Grey family who do go as fully for the Reformation as possible, the other great surviving Yorkist families become impassioned supporters of traditional Catholic piety. Henry feels a great sense of ingratitude – these are people who he’s rescued from utter oblivion and the threat of execution.”

By the time of that divorce in the 1530s, Henry has mutated from the chivalrous prince of his youth, much applauded for this sporting prowess, scholarship and chivalry, to the hulking tyrant of his later years. David Starkey sees the two Henrys as very different people with barely any similarities in character. He does identify one trait that holds from Henry’s youth, though: “There’s only one thing that you can say is a continuum. It’s his nicest feature: his attitude to women and love. He is a poet. Henry expects love and marriage to be the same”. ■

David Starkey is one of Britain’s most famous historians, with a number of bestselling books and TV series behind him. His doctoral research concerned Henry VIII



## THE EARLY YEARS OF HENRY VIII

**28 June 1491**

Prince Henry (pictured below left), second son of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, is born in Greenwich, a brother to older siblings Arthur and Margaret.

**31 October 1494**

Henry is invested as the Duke of York in London.

**14 November 1501**

Arthur weds Catherine of Aragon at St Paul’s Cathedral.

**2 April 1502**

Twenty weeks after the wedding, Arthur dies at the age of 15, from an unknown ailment, leaving his ten-year-old brother as heir to the throne of England.

**11 February 1503**

Elizabeth of York dies at the age of 37, nine days after giving birth to her daughter, Katherine.

**23 February 1503**

Prince Henry takes over his late brother’s title as Prince of Wales. The following June, Henry becomes betrothed to Arthur’s widow, Catherine of Aragon. The betrothal, aimed at ending the Wars of the Roses, takes place in London. Henry reaches the age of 14.

**21 April 1509**

Henry VII dies of tuberculosis at Richmond Palace and is interred in Westminster Abbey. Henry ascends to the throne at the age of 18.

**11 June 1509**

Henry reversing his feelings about a marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry marries his brother’s widow in a low-key ceremony in Greenwich.

**25 June 1509**

Two days after his coronation, Henry arrests two of his father’s ministers for high treason.



# THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

Lucy Wooding tells **Rob Attar** about England's transformation from Catholicism to Protestantism



**T**ake a look at any British coin. On the 'heads' side you will see the initials FD. This stands for *Fides Defensor*, a Latin phrase that translates as 'Defender of the Faith'. It is a title that was awarded by Pope Leo X to Henry VIII in 1521 in recognition of a book the king had written attacking the ideas of the controversial German theologian Martin Luther. At that time, Henry was towing the line in exemplary fashion and the Vatican must have felt pretty secure about Catholicism's future in England.

Elsewhere in Europe, Christianity was undergoing a seismic transformation. In 1517 Martin Luther had nailed his 95 theses, which questioned Catholic practice,

to a church door in Wittenberg. Luther and his followers were dismayed by what they saw as the excessive power and corruption of the church. Luther was excommunicated but his message did not die. Instead it spread rapidly, aided by the fledgling printing press. The Lutherans spearheaded the Protestant movement – a coalition that repudiated aspects of Catholic doctrine and broke off from Rome.

With a relatively popular church and a seemingly compliant king, England did not appear fertile territory for Protestantism – until Anne Boleyn arrived at Henry's court. He was desperate to marry her, hoping that she could give him the male heir that his queen Catherine of Aragon had not. In 1527 Henry asked Pope

Clement VII to annul his marriage on the grounds that Catherine had previously been his brother Arthur's wife – something he alleged was contrary to scripture.

"If the pope had been able to sort out Henry's marital difficulties the king would have remained a good Catholic monarch," says Lucy Wooding. Yet the pope was under pressure from the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Catherine's nephew, not to grant the annulment, and he rejected Henry's appeals.

Determined to marry Anne, Henry took drastic action. In 1533 he installed his henchman Thomas Cranmer as archbishop of Canterbury and in return Cranmer granted the king a divorce. Shortly afterwards Anne Boleyn (herself





## THE REFORMATION

a reformer) became queen. The following year came the Act of Supremacy, whereby Henry was declared the supreme head of the Church of England. The break from Rome was complete.

Henry used his freedom to attack aspects of the church that he disliked, most notably through the dissolution of 800 monasteries. Nevertheless, the English king was by no means a Protestant, as Wooding explains. “Some of what Henry did was destructive of Catholic practice but in terms of doctrine he always upheld the seven sacraments. He heard mass at least once a day, and when he died he had 10,000 masses said for his soul.”

It was under Henry VIII's son, the boy king Edward VI, that England lurched

towards Protestantism. Aged nine when he was crowned in 1547, Edward fell under the influence of his two Protestant regents, the Duke of Somerset and the Duke of Northumberland, as well as archbishop Cranmer, who combined to push through a programme of reform. Protestants were not yet in the majority but they held a number of key positions and, though much of the public disagreed with the Reformation, no opposition was effective enough to halt the changes.

When Edward died in 1553 his Catholic sister, Mary, became queen. She spent her reign reintroducing Catholic priests and rituals.

Had Mary lived, Protestantism would probably have been defeated, even though

the public was anxious about Mary's marriage to Philip II of Spain. England might still be Catholic today had not Mary died in 1558 and been replaced by Anne Boleyn's Protestant daughter, Elizabeth, who continued where her brother left off.

Unlike Mary and Edward, Elizabeth enjoyed a long reign, which gave her the time to build a Protestant church with solid foundations. The attack by the Spanish Armada in 1588 then helped to cement the view of Catholicism as a foreign foe – a notion that would remain prevalent in England for centuries.

Lucy Wooding is a Langford Fellow and tutor in history at Lincoln College, Oxford, and author of *Henry VIII* (Routledge, 2008)



### THE ENGLISH REFORMATION: 10 PLACES TO EXPLORE

#### 1 Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, Suffolk

● [www.longmelfordchurch.com](http://www.longmelfordchurch.com)

The traditional view is that the late medieval church was corrupt, superstitious and unpopular, and that's why the Reformation happened. More recent research, however, has shown that the English church on the eve of the break from Rome was popular with the public. The parish church was the focal point of most communities, and church rituals and celebrations helped promote social unity.

Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, completed in 1484, is a fine example of religious architecture of this period. The splendour of its design owes much to significant investment from local merchants, who were clearly firm supporters of their church in the decades before the Reformation.

Today the church remains in excellent condition. Its medieval stained glass windows are largely intact and the striking Lady Chapel reveals the particular devotion of the parishioners to the Virgin Mary.



Holy Trinity Church Long Melford is testament to the popularity of the church prior to the Reformation



#### 3 Hampton Court Palace, Surrey

● [www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace](http://www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace)

Henry VIII was keen on religious reform but if it hadn't been for his matrimonial problems, the English Reformation would have been unlikely.

Hoping to marry Anne Boleyn, Henry asked the pope for an annulment in 1527. When this was refused Henry repudiated the pope's authority and took matters into his own hands. Aided by his principal advisor, Thomas Cromwell, the king pressurised the clergy into submitting to his authority and forced them in 1532 to renounce their ability to make church law without

#### 2 Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford

● [www.chch.ox.ac.uk/Cathedral](http://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/Cathedral)

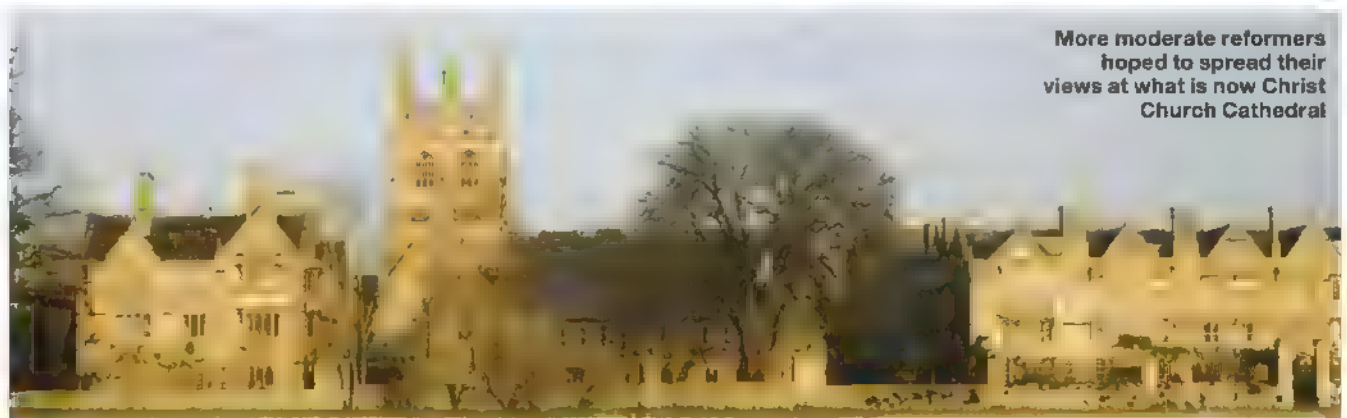
Although the church was popular in 16th-century England, there were voices calling for improvements. Many of these came from the humanist movement, which studied classical texts and adopted a more critical mindset than in previous times. Humanism was not

incompatible with Catholicism and many, including Henry VIII, followed humanist thought without turning to Protestantism.

When it came to Christianity, several humanists sought to attack superstition and improve the education of the clergy by teaching them Greek and Hebrew, the languages of the Bible. To this end the lord chancellor of England, Cardinal Wolsey, took over the Augustinian priory of St Frideswide in Oxford in 1524 and replaced it with a centre for humanist

learning called Cardinal College. Wolsey fell from grace in 1529 and Henry himself took over the running of the college, which was renamed King's College. He later refounded it as Christ Church Cathedral, a title it has kept.

Nowadays the cathedral is both a church and a college. Its buildings have been improved several times over the years, most notably in 1682 when former student Christopher Wren added the imposing Tom Tower.



More moderate reformers hoped to spread their views at what is now Christ Church Cathedral





Hampton Court Palace saw crucial developments in Henry's personal life

his approval. In 1533 he appointed his advisor Thomas Cranmer as archbishop of Canterbury and in May of that year Cranmer annulled Henry's marriage, legalising his wedding to Anne Boleyn.

Henry VIII had acquired Hampton Court in the 1520s and during his reign he greatly improved the palace. It became his favourite residence. He spent time here with Anne Boleyn before she was executed on suspicion of adultery in 1536, having produced only a daughter. His third marriage to Jane Seymour produced the son Henry had been longing for, Prince Edward, who was born and baptised at Hampton Court in 1537.



**1 Long Melford Holy Trinity Church, Suffolk**

**2 Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford**

**3 Hampton Court Palace, Surrey**

**4 Westminster Abbey, London**

**5 Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire**

**6 Walsingham Abbey, Norfolk**

**7 Cartmel Priory, Cumbria**

**8 Peterborough Cathedral, Cambridgeshire**

**9 Binham Priory, Norfolk**

**10 St John's College, Oxford**

**4 Westminster Abbey, London**

● [www.westminster-abbey.org](http://www.westminster-abbey.org)

In 1534 Henry VIII declared himself the supreme head of the Church of England. In June 1534 an order said that no one was allowed to preach in favour of saint worship, and later in the 1530s many shrines around the country were closed down.

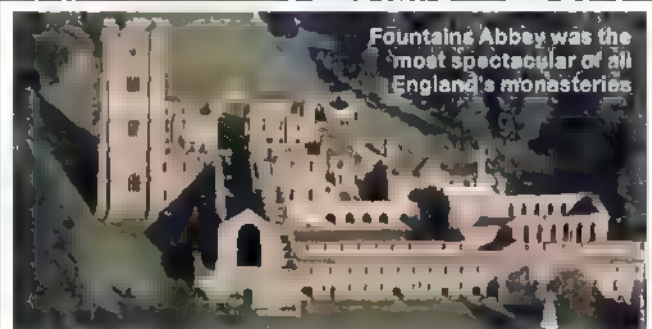
Westminster Abbey, however, was spared the violence. It was the foundation of Edward the Confessor, a saint but crucially also a king, so Henry and the monarchs who followed him treated it with more respect. Henry, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth were all crowned at the 13th-century abbey despite their differing religious views. The monastery here was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1540 but then reinstated briefly

under Mary. Queen Elizabeth converted the abbey into a collegiate church in 1560 and it remained an important ecclesiastical focus during her reign.

Edward the Confessor's shrine remains part of the abbey today. It is surrounded by the tombs of several other English monarchs.



The chapel of Edward the Confessor



Fountains Abbey was the most spectacular of all England's monasteries

**5 Fountains Abbey Yorkshire**

● [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey)

While the ostensible motive behind the dissolution of the monasteries was the monks' supposed impropriety and sexual depravity, a key motive for the Dissolution was financial. The monasteries were fabulously wealthy, and Henry wanted to plunder their riches.

Fountains Abbey was founded in 1132. It was dissolved in 1539 and is now the country's largest monastic ruin. The remains reveal evidence of building work undertaken shortly before the abbey's destruction, suggesting that it was flourishing not long before its end.

Fountains Abbey's historical importance was recognised in 1987 when it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



### THE ENGLISH REFORMATION 10 PLACES TO EXPLORE



#### 6 Walsingham Abbey, Norfolk

● [www.walsinghamabbey.com](http://www.walsinghamabbey.com)

Founded in 1153, Walsingham Abbey was destroyed during the Dissolution. Today the abbey lies in ruins but in more recent times two shrines have been established to the Virgin Mary there – one Catholic and one Anglican.

This illustrates an important point about the complexities of the Reformation in England. It is true that Henry broke with the past in many ways: dissolving monasteries, attacking some aspects of traditional devotion and introducing an English Bible. Yet he never endorsed Protestant doctrine and maintained the seven sacraments and the Latin Mass of Catholic tradition.

The English Reformation was ambiguous from the start, containing elements of both old and new. It was not until Elizabeth I's reign that Protestantism truly took hold and even then it contained ambiguities. There is still a loyal Catholic remnant in England, while elements of Catholic practice remain within the Anglican tradition. All this harks back to the uncertain birth of the Reformation.



#### 7 Cartmel Priory, Cumbria

● [www.cartmelpriory.org.uk](http://www.cartmelpriory.org.uk)

When Henry VIII's commissioners arrived at the 12th-century Cartmel Priory in Cumbria, the local townsfolk took action to protect it. As a community they had paid for the construction of the south aisle and they argued with the commissioners that this meant it belonged to them. Their argument didn't prevent valuable lead from the priory roof being removed but the south aisle was undamaged and in the 17th century a new roof was added.

Thanks to the community's protest, Cartmel Priory's church survives in beautiful condition today. Not every monastery was so lucky. In other cases local landowners shared in the spoils of the Dissolution, claiming the land and building materials for themselves. By doing so they inextricably connected themselves with the Reformation and made it very difficult for a restoration of the monasteries ever to take place.



#### 9 Binham Priory, Norfolk

● [www.english-heritag.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

For over 400 years a community of Benedictine monks lived at Binham Priory before it was closed in 1539. The majority of buildings were destroyed but the nave continued to be used as the parish church. Nowadays the remains of the priory are in the care of English Heritage and can be visited for free.

On the church's rood screen there is a rather curious image. A picture of St Michael has been whitewashed over and Protestant text painted on top of it. The new paint has, however, partially flecked away and through the gaps in the words, Michael is peeping through. This, according to Lucy Wooding, is "a fabulous metaphor for the popular church in the wake of the Reformation – Protestantism superimposed upon still visible Catholic beliefs and traditions".





## 8 Peterborough Cathedral, Cambridgeshire

● [www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk](http://www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk)

Peterborough Cathedral's origins go back to AD 655 when it was founded as a monastic church. In the 12th century it was rebuilt in its present form. Then in 1541 Henry refounded the church as one of six new cathedrals he created, highlighting the fact that not everything he did in this period was destructive. These cathedrals became an integral part of the Church of England. The bishops were good tools of local government, and being able to appoint them enabled the monarch to create useful loyal servants around the country.

Two queens intrinsically involved in the story of the Reformation were buried at Peterborough Cathedral. The first was Catherine of Aragon, who died in 1536 when the church was still an abbey. The second was Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic claimant to the throne whose presence in England was a thorn in Elizabeth's side until 1587, when she was executed for treason. Mary's remains were transferred to Westminster Abbey in 1612 by her son, James, who had become king of England after Elizabeth's death. Catherine's grave remains at Peterborough, however, and can still be seen to this day.



St John's College was founded in an attempt to help undo the Reformation

## St Michael the Archangel peeps through Binham Priory's rood screen



## 10 St John's College, Oxford

● [www.sjc.ox.ac.uk](http://www.sjc.ox.ac.uk)

Education was fundamental to the Reformation. The universities were the bedrock of humanist ideas and later became fertile territory for Protestantism, which began in England as an elite movement rather than a popular one. Because priests were trained at universities, trends in theological education could have a major impact on the religious life of the country.

When Catherine of Aragon's Catholic daughter, Mary, became queen in 1553 she sought to undo the work of her Protestant half-brother Edward VI. She restored Catholic doctrine and revived Catholic practice in the parishes. Her reputation as 'Bloody Mary' was largely an Elizabethan creation. Mary also sought to reaffirm her faith in gentler ways, encouraging foundations such as St John's College as a Catholic establishment.

It is interesting to speculate about what might have happened had Mary's reign lasted longer than five years. Protestantism was far from entrenched in 1553, and had Mary been in better health the Catholic revival might have become a permanent one. As it was, Elizabeth undid almost all of Mary's work after she succeeded her half-sister in 1558. Under the Virgin Queen, St John's College became Protestant as part of a wider policy of removing the vestiges of Catholic influence in the universities.



# Why did Anne Boleyn have to die?

Conspiracy, malicious gossip, witchcraft or guilty as charged? **Suzannah Lipscomb** tries to unearth the real reason why Henry VIII sent his second wife to the executioner's block

n the morning of 19 May 1536, Anne Boleyn climbed the scaffold erected on Tower Green, within the walls of the Tower of London. She gave a speech praising the goodness and mercy of the king, and asked those gathered to pray for her. Then she removed her fine, ermine-trimmed gown, and knelt down – and the expensive French executioner that Henry VIII had ordered swung his sword and “divided her neck at a blow”.

Her death is so familiar to us that it is hard to imagine how shocking it would have been: the queen of England executed on charges of adultery, incest and conspiring the king's death. And not just any queen: this was the woman for whom Henry VIII had abandoned his wife of nearly 24 years, waited seven long years to wed, and even revolutionised his country's church. Yet just three years later her head was off – and to this day historians cannot agree why she had to die.

Had Henry and Anne's relationship gone into terminal decline, prompting Henry to invent the charges against his wife? Was Thomas Cromwell responsible for Anne's demise? Or was she indeed guilty of the charges laid against her? Evidence is limited – but there is enough to appear to support several very different conclusions.

There are a number of undisputed facts relating to Anne's fall. On Sunday 30 April 1536 Mark Smeaton, a musician from the queen's household, was arrested; he was then interrogated at Cromwell's house in Stepney. On the same evening the king postponed a trip with Anne to Calais, planned for 2 May.

The next day, 1 May, Smeaton was moved to the Tower. Henry attended the May Day jousts at Greenwich but left with a small group of intimates. These included Sir Henry Norris, a personal body servant and one of his closest friends, whom he questioned throughout the journey. At dawn the next day Norris was taken to the Tower. Anne and her brother George, Lord Rochford, were also arrested.

On 4 and 5 May, more courtiers from the king's privy chamber – William Brereton, Richard Page, Francis Weston, Thomas Wyatt and Francis Bryan – were arrested. The latter was questioned and released, but the others were imprisoned in the Tower. On 10 May, a grand jury indicted all of the accused, apart from Page and Wyatt. On 12 May, Smeaton, Brereton, Weston and Norris were tried and found guilty of adultery with the queen, and of conspiring the king's death.

On 15 May, Anne and Rochford were tried within the Tower by a court of 26 peers presided over by their uncle, the Duke of Norfolk. Both were found guilty of high treason. On 17 May Archbishop Thomas Cranmer declared the marriage of Henry and Anne null, and by 19 May all six convicted had been executed. Later that day, Cranmer issued a dispensation allowing Henry and Jane Seymour to marry; they were betrothed on 20 May and married 10 days later.

What could explain this rapid and surprising turn of events? The first theory,



argued by Boleyn biographer and scholar GW Bernard, is simply that Anne was guilty of the charges against her. Yet even he is equivocal, suggesting the Scottish legal verdict of 'not proven' – he concludes that, though the evidence is insufficient to prove definitively that Anne and those accused with her were guilty, neither does it prove their innocence.

### Scandalous affairs

Anne's guilt was, naturally, the official line. Writing to the bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, Cromwell stated with certainty – before Anne's trial – that "the queen's incontinent living was so rank and common that the ladies of her privy chamber could not conceal it."

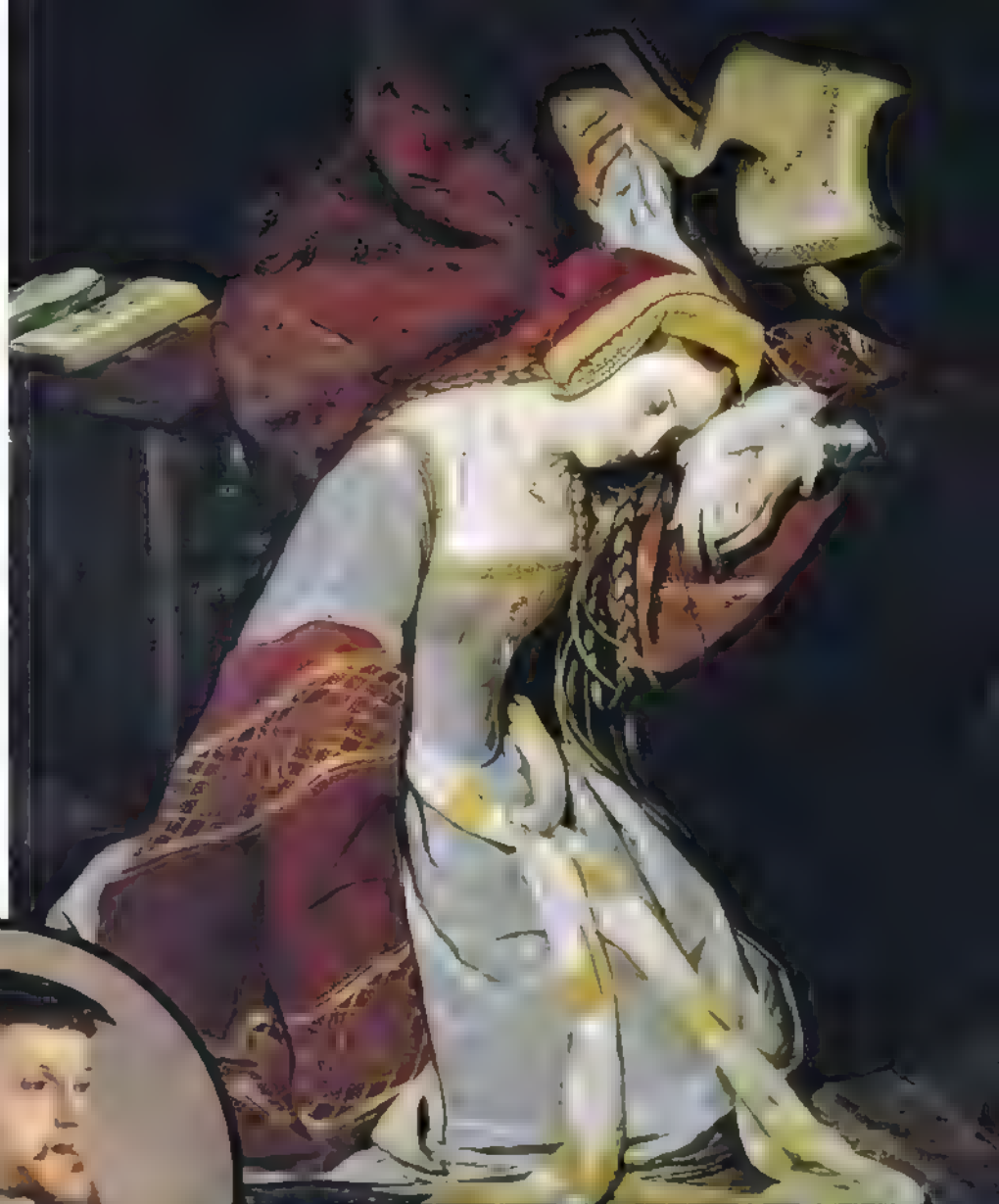
The key piece of evidence was undoubtedly the confession by the first man accused, Smeaton, that he had had sexual intercourse with the queen three times. Though it was probably obtained under torture (the accounts vary), he never retracted his confession.

Unlikely as it was to be true, it catapulted the investigation to a different, far more serious level. All subsequent evidence was tainted with a presumption of guilt. Henry VIII's intimate questioning of Norris, and his promise of "pardon in case he would utter the truth", must be understood in this light: whatever Norris said, or refused to say, it reinforced Henry's conviction of his guilt.

Other evidence for Anne's guilt is unclear – the trial documents do not survive. Her indictment, however, states that Anne "did falsely and traitorously procure by base conversations and kisses, touchings, gifts and other infamous incitations, divers of the king's daily and familiar servants to be her adulterers and concubines, so that several... yielded to her vile provocations". She even, it charges, "procured and incited her own natural brother... to violate her, alluring him with her tongue in the said George's mouth, and the said George's tongue in hers". Yet, as another Boleyn biographer Eric Ives noted, three-quarters of the specific accusations of adulterous liaisons made in the



Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and nephew of Catherine of Aragon



Édouard Cibot's painting of 1835 depicts Anne imprisoned in the Tower of London prior to her execution

indictment can be discredited, even 500 years later.

Certainly, Anne maintained her innocence.

During her imprisonment Sir William Kingston, constable of the Tower, reported Anne's remarks to Cromwell. His first letter details Anne's ardent declaration of innocence: "I am as clear from the company of man, as for sin... as I am clear from you, and the king's true wedded wife."

A few days later, Anne comforted herself that she would have justice: "She said if any man accuse me I can say but nay, and they can bring no witness." Crucially, the night before her execution she swore "on peril of her soul's damnation", before and after receiving the Eucharist, that she was innocent – a serious act in that religious age.

Anne was not alone in professing her innocence. As Sir Edward Baynton put it: "No man will confess any thing against her, but only Mark of any actual thing." And even Eustace Chapuys, ambassador for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V

and Anne's arch-enemy, would finally conclude that everyone besides Smeaton was "condemned upon presumption and certain indications, without valid proof or confession".

Another set of historians have favoured the explanation that Anne was the victim of a conspiracy by Thomas Cromwell and a court faction involving the Seymours. This rests upon a view of Henry as a pliable king whose courtiers could "bounce" him into action and tip him "by a crisis" into rejecting Anne. But why should Anne and Cromwell, erstwhile allies of a reformist bent, fall out? Differences of opinion are thought to have arisen over the use of funds from the dissolution of the monasteries, as well as matters of foreign policy – seemingly slender motives for destroying a queen.

It has been suggested that Cromwell's court faction intended to replace Anne with Jane Seymour. However, there is little evidence that, before Anne was accused of adultery, Henry had planned to make Jane his wife. Marriage to Jane was, surely,



a symptom and a product of Anne's downfall, not a cause.

The pivotal piece of evidence for a conspiracy is a remark made by Cromwell to Chapuys after Anne's death. In a letter to Charles V, Chapuys wrote that Cromwell had told him "*il se mist a fantasier et conspirer le dict affaire*," which has been translated as "he set himself to devise and conspire the said affair," suggesting that Cromwell plotted against Anne.

Crucially, however, this phrase is often used out of context. The previous sentence states that "he himself [Cromwell] had been authorised and commissioned by the king to prosecute and bring to an end the mistress's trial, to do which he had taken considerable trouble." If we accept this account, it is impossible to dismiss Henry VIII from the picture – Cromwell claimed not to be acting alone.

It has been proposed, therefore, that Henry asked Cromwell to get rid of Anne. David Starkey suggested that "Anne's proud and abrasive character soon became intolerable to her husband." JJ Scarsbrick, author of the authoritative volume *Henry VIII*, agreed: "What had once been devastating infatuation turned into bloodthirsty loathing, for reasons we will never completely know."

### A tumultuous relationship

Evidence for this view is taken from the writings of the ever-hopeful Chapuys. As a Catholic and a supporter of Catherine of Aragon, he referred to Anne as "the concubine" or "the she-devil", and had made bitter assertions about the doomed state of Henry and Anne's relationship even at the height of their happiness in late summer 1533. But Chapuys himself recognised that Henry and Anne had always been prone to "lovers' quarrels", and that the king's character was very "changeable".

True, Henry and Anne were direct with each other: they got angry, shouted and became jealous. But they were also frequently described as being "merry" together; it was an epithet still being applied to them during the autumn of 1535 – and one that was appended to their marriage more often than to any of Henry's other unions. Bernard has described theirs as a "tumultuous relationship of sunshine and storms".

Some have proposed that the miscarriage of a male foetus suffered by Anne in January 1536 led inexorably to her downfall. Did it cause Henry to believe that Anne would never be able to bear him an heir, and thus to consider the marriage doomed? Certainly, the king was reported



"Henry and Anne were direct with each other: **they got angry**, shouted and became jealous. But they were also **frequently described as being 'merry'** together"

to have shown "great disappointment and sorrow". Chapuys wrote that Henry, during his visit to Anne's chamber after the tragedy, said very little except: "I see that God will not give me male children."

Henry then left Anne at Greenwich to convalesce while he went to Whitehall to mark the feast day of Saint Matthew. Chapuys, rather maliciously, interpreted this as showing that Henry had abandoned Anne, "whereas in former times he could hardly be one hour without her". Clearly, the miscarriage was a great blow to both Henry and Anne – yet another four months were to pass before Anne's death, so demonstrating a direct link between the events would be problematic.

Another story, reported third-hand by Chapuys, quotes Henry as telling an unidentified courtier that he had married

Anne "seduced and constrained by sortilèges". That last word translates as 'sorcery, spells, charms', and has given rise to the suggestion that Anne Boleyn dabbled in witchcraft. Though this is regularly cited as one of the charges of which she was found guilty, it is not mentioned in the indictment.

Ives, though, pointed out that the primary English meaning of sortilèges at this time was 'divination', a translation that changes the meaning of Henry's comment. It could imply that he was induced to marry Anne by premarital prophecies that she would bear sons, or could refer simply to Henry's earlier infatuation or 'bewitchment' by Anne.

The idea of bewitchment has become attached to another theory, which holds that the reason for Anne's ruin was that the





A woodcut depicting Anne's coronation in 1533. Her marriage to Henry has been described as "a tumultuous relationship of sunshine and storms"

foetus she miscarried was deformed. According to Tudor specialist Retha Warnicke, the delivery of a "shapeless mass of flesh" proved in Henry's mind that Anne was both a witch and adulterously promiscuous. But this comes from a Catholic propagandist, Nicholas Sander, writing 50 years later; there is no contemporary evidence to sustain it.

### Diplomatic coup

An event in April 1536 suggests that, just weeks before Anne was executed, Henry was still committed to his marriage. In the early months of 1536, Henry was increasing the pressure on Charles V to recognise Anne as his wife. On 18 April he invited Chapuys to the court. Events that day were deliberately staged: the ambassador attended mass and, as Henry and Anne descended from the royal pew to the chapel, she stopped and bowed to Chapuys. Etiquette dictated that he return the gesture – a significant diplomatic coup, because it implied recognition by the ambassador and, by extension, his emperor. It would, as Bernard has argued, have been extraordinarily capricious of Henry to seek to have Anne recognised as his wife if he already harboured intentions of ridding himself of her soon after.

So was it not guilt, nor a court coup, nor Henry's hatred of Anne that led to her

downfall but, rather, a combination of malicious gossip and her own indiscretions?

A poetic account written in June 1536 by Lancelot de Carles, secretary to the French ambassador, relates that one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting, Elizabeth Browne, was accused of loose living. She made light of her own guilt by stating that "it was little in her case in comparison with that of the queen". These words reached Cromwell who, according to de Carles, reported them to Henry; the king blanched and, very reluctantly, ordered him to investigate.

This aligns with Cromwell's own retelling of the events. De Carles adds a crucial, though unsubstantiated, clause, Henry telling Cromwell that "if it turns out that your report, which I do not wish to believe, is untrue, you will receive pain of death in place of [the accused]". So Cromwell may have had reason to find evidence of Anne's guilt.

Given that Anne was accused of conspiring the king's death (the only charge that constituted treason – adultery was not covered by the treason law), it seems likely that the evidence used to demonstrate her guilt was a conversation she recalled with Norris.

Anne had asked Norris why he did not go through with his marriage. He had replied that "he wold tary a time," leading her to taunt him with the fateful words

"you loke for ded men's showys; for yf owth cam to the King but good, you would loke to have me." Norris's flustered response – that "yf he should have any such thought, he wold hys hed war of" – provoked her to retort that "she could undo him if she would," and "ther with thay felle yowt" ("there with they fell out").

The Treasons Act of 1534 held that even imagining the death of the king was treasonous, so Anne's conversation with Norris was charged, reckless and, arguably, fatal – useful ammunition if Cromwell were looking for dirt. Was it, as Greg Walker (author of *Writing Under Tyranny*) has suggested, not what Anne did but what she said that made her appear guilty?

When it comes to Anne Boleyn's fall, historians give their 'best guess' answers on the basis of available evidence. For my part, it is the final 'cock-up theory' that convinces me. I believe that Anne was innocent, but caught out by her careless words. Henry was convinced by the charges against her; it was a devastating blow from which he never recovered. For Anne, of course, the consequences were far more terrible. ■

**Suzannah Lipscomb** is senior lecturer in early modern history at New College of the Humanities. Her most recent book is *The King is Dead: The Last Will and Testament of Henry VIII* (Head of Zeus, 2015)

Hans Holbein's portrait of the "pudgy and watchful" Thomas Cromwell. Talent helped him to a position of power, but nothing could prevent his fall from grace.



# THOMAS CROMWELL

## HERETIC OR IDEALIST?

Historians cast Henry VIII's chief minister as a scheming, rapacious vulture. But, asks **Diarmaid MacCulloch**, does this characterisation really do him justice?



Poor Thomas Cromwell. He has rarely been given a good press – even in the triumphant island story as told by the champions of Protestant England, in which the pope’s deluded followers were repeatedly put in their place so the British empire could flourish and spread Christian civilisation far and wide. In that telling, Henry VIII receives all the credit for leading Tudor England in walking tall – and he had the glamour that his most effective minister notoriously lacked.

The various surviving copies of Hans Holbein’s portrait of Cromwell – showing him as pudgy and watchful, expensively but plainly dressed – are distinctly unflattering to this busy royal minister, to the extent that I wonder if vengeful Catholics in Queen Mary Tudor’s reign destroyed any pictures that presented him in a kinder light.

Cromwell has long been unpopular among many Roman Catholics. Curiously, he has also been derided by many Anglicans who have turned away from their Protestant Reformation heritage and waxed sentimental about England’s monastic ruins – Cromwell’s central role in the destructive Dissolution can’t be denied. In his days, many politicians and notables hated him out of sheer snobbery: how, they must have felt, could talent and efficiency possibly be allowed to snatch power from good breeding and ancient pedigree? So, from several different points of view, Cromwell ends up being seen as a thug in a doublet, doing the bidding of Henry VIII, the Tudor Stalin.

### Between the lines

In two brilliant novels, with another to come, Hilary Mantel has worked to alter this dismal picture and recapture the complexity of this fascinating, self-taught man. Cromwell emerged from the back alleys of rural Putney (his father really was a thug) to become Earl of Essex, one of the oldest noble titles in the realm – yet in the moment of this greatest triumph, he was destroyed.

There is a difficulty in ever writing Cromwell’s life story properly. His papers survive in abundance, thanks to a political accident – at his arrest they were seized from his filing system, and have stayed in government hands ever since – but they amount to the contents of his in-tray, rather than letters he wrote himself. I suggest that this is the result of a quick decision made by his household when he was arrested: they burned the

“Cromwell emerged from the back alleys of rural Putney to become **Earl of Essex**, one of the oldest noble titles in the realm”

out-tray because that is where the incriminating material would be. It would, they believed, be much harder for Cromwell’s enemies surrounding the king to build an accusation on letters written by others.

Once we try to penetrate the silence, a rather different Cromwell emerges. His intimate friendship with thoughtful, carefully candid Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, is telling: I have deduced from surviving archives that in the 1530s they were so much a team that Cranmer kept a special file just for their exchanges of letters, separate from other correspondence. During his service to Cardinal Wolsey in the 1520s, Cromwell became a quiet friend to the Thames Valley Lollards, a group of religious dissenters that questioned the established church.

Over the following decade, when Henry VIII effectively granted him Wolsey’s powers in the church, he became a busy and effective promoter of the new religion and its enthusiasts. And in his latter years he became a discreet organiser of contacts

with the most radical European mainstream Reformations, in Zurich and northern Switzerland – far beyond anything the king could have approved, and highly dangerous for him. That was not the action of a political cynic.

### Heretic usurper

When members of the Catholic aristocracy persuaded Henry VIII that Cromwell should die, the clincher for the king was the accusation that Cromwell was a heretic. So in Henry’s mind, Cromwell was executed for the right reason – heresy. But he also died because members of the English nobility were affronted that this talented upstart usurped what they regarded as their natural place in government. By 1539–40 Cromwell was increasingly unwell and his political judgment faltered, giving his enemies the opportunity that they had lacked in his brief period of unrivalled power just a couple of years earlier.

Cromwell made four terrible mistakes in his last year of life. One is very well known, two are less so, and one has previously been missed altogether. First, and famously, it was Cromwell’s idea to marry the widower king to the German princess Anne of Cleves, believing that it would draw England closer to the German Reformation – yet again his motives were religion. But it would also stop Henry marrying an English nobleman’s daughter – and Cromwell feared the toffs.

If only he had listened to Archbishop Cranmer’s opposition, and not placed his faith in over-ingenious portrait-painters and the arts of the Tudor advertising industry, who had exaggerated the bride-to-be’s charms. As it was, when the king met Anne of Cleves it was a disaster: he could not bear the sight of her (couldn’t get an erection, his lawyers claimed).



Henry Bourchier, Earl of Essex. When he died in 1540, Cromwell quickly claimed the title as his own





## Fatal mistakes

That was a ghastly error, but worse was to come – the element in the story previously forgotten. Thetford Priory in Norfolk was the family burial place of the dukes of Norfolk. Thomas Howard, the third duke, was a crusty old religious traditionalist who wanted to save the priory from dissolution and refund it as a college of priests.

Thetford hung on longer than almost any other monastery in England but eventually, in February 1540, it closed – and there was no college in the offing. Cromwell, absurdly over-confident, had made sure that the priory was simply shut down, and the duke's plans were frustrated. Howard had to move some of his family tombs and ancestral bones 35 miles to Framlingham in Suffolk. Imagine the feelings of England's senior nobleman at this insult to his family.

Two dark coincidences then made matters even worse. First, in March 1540, came the death of Henry Bourchier, 15th Earl of Essex – an aristocrat of equal standing to the Duke of Norfolk. Cromwell decided that it would be agreeable if he himself became Earl of Essex, one of the oldest titles in England – and so, within a few weeks, he was.

A week after Bourchier's death came that of John de Vere, the 15th Earl of Oxford,

another ultra blue-blood who had been hereditary Great Chamberlain of England, one of the oldest royal offices in the land – which Cromwell hoovered up, too. Again, imagine how the Duke of Norfolk felt – that Putney boy does it again!

So the Duke of Norfolk had both the motive and, with Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves, the opportunity to strike back. The king felt humiliated, and Cromwell was to blame. Henry was always easy to influence, if one knew how, and became very ready to listen to those who gave him a reason to cut Cromwell down to size – not least the fact that his chief minister had pushed ahead with religious change behind his back. The king was easily persuaded that Cromwell was a heretic and a traitor.

It was a time of wild swings of fortune, with religious conservatives and Protestants both being imprisoned in turn. The wildest swing of all came on 10 June 1540 when Cromwell was arrested as he turned up for a routine meeting of the Privy Council. (The arrest was performed with relish by the Duke of Norfolk, who personally tore the Garter badge of St George from Cromwell's clothing.)

## Lasting legacy

Cromwell was sent to the Tower of London and never saw the king again. If he had,

he might have been saved, but his letters begging for an audience were ignored – perhaps Henry never saw them. Parliament voted him legally dead (even Cranmer voted for that), and soon he was actually dead, executed on Tower Hill on 28 July 1540.

Within a few months, Henry was lamenting that his courtiers had deceived him, saying, according to the French ambassador, that "on pretexts of some trivial faults... they had made several false accusations to him, as a result of which he had put to death the most faithful servant he had ever had".

Too late to save Cromwell the man from his fate, but not too late for his legacy. The young Protestant bureaucrats that he had trained in the 1530s went on to rule Reformation England: Nicholas Bacon and William Cecil lived until 1579 and 1598 respectively, becoming the statesmen who steered the triumphant Protestantism of Elizabethan England.

That is the measure of Cromwell's greatness, and of the way in which he shaped the future of these islands. We need to put Cromwell back in the centre of Tudor England's picture. We should question if he really was "an ambitious and totally corrupt statesman... an opportunistic jack-the-lad, a ruffian on the make," as his biographer, Robert Hutchinson, labelled him.





Henry VIII suppresses the pope in this 16th-century engraving. Cromwell was a driving force behind the Reformation

“Within a few months, Henry was lamenting that he had been deceived, saying he had **‘put to death the most faithful servant he had ever had’**”

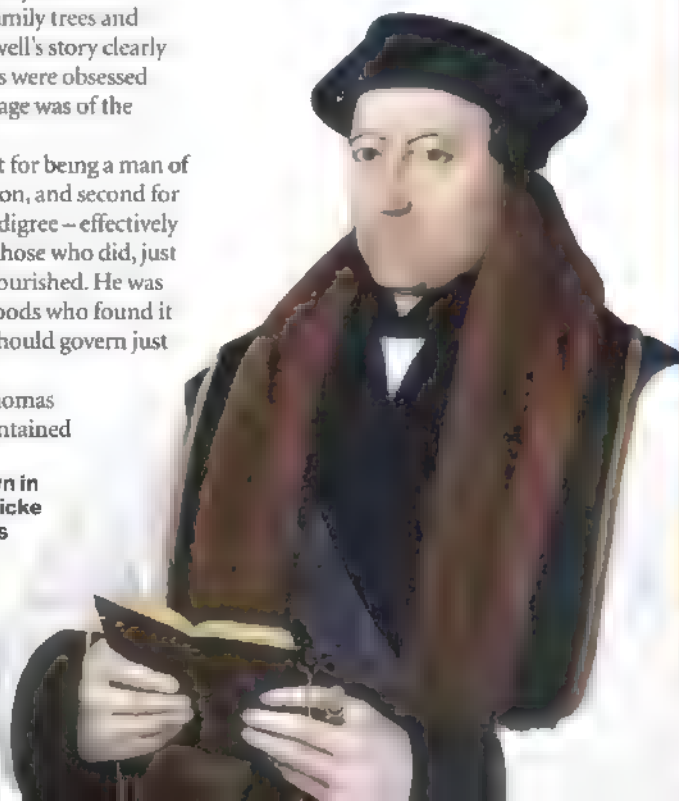
I must emphasise that, though there's much that seems modern in Cromwell's story – high political infighting, for one – we should realise that the Tudors viewed politics through two lenses that have been removed from the eyes of modern British politicians. In this country religion and politics are now largely separate entities, in Tudor times the two were completely intertwined. Likewise, today we don't worry too much about family trees and heraldry, whereas Cromwell's story clearly illustrates that the Tudors were obsessed by them both – your lineage was of the utmost importance.

So Cromwell died first for being a man of the Protestant Reformation, and second for not having an ancient pedigree – effectively insulting and upstaging those who did, just because he existed and flourished. He was the victim of the blue-bloods who found it insufferable that a man should govern just because he had talent.

So I present to you Thomas Cromwell: a cool, self-contained

idealist who had hoped to shape the kingdom of England in the name of a new religion – the remaker of this realm. **II**

Diarmaid MacCulloch is professor of the history of the church at Oxford, an author and TV presenter. His new book about Thomas Cromwell is due to be published by Allen Lane in 2017



Thomas Cranmer, shown in a painting by Gerlach Flicke (1545), was great friends with Cromwell – though his advice frequently went unheeded

## THE REIGN OF HENRY VIII

1510

Construction begins on the famous naval ship, the *Mary Rose*. It is the first English gunship

10 September 1511

Thomas Wolsey is chosen as Henry's Lord Chancellor of England. He is now second in power only to the king

1521

The Field of the Cloth of Gold

Henry VIII meets his great rival, Francis I of France, in a lavish show of friendship. They are soon at war again

10 April 1522

The Treaty of the More is signed between England and France.

Henry VIII agrees to give up some territorial claims on France in exchange for a yearly pension of £20,000

1524

Thomas Wolsey believes the king is engineering his downfall and so gifts him Hampton Court Palace

16 November 1524

Thomas Cromwell replaces his fallen master, Wolsey, as the rising star of Henry's court

November 1534

The Act of Supremacy is passed and Henry VIII breaks with the church in Rome. He is declared supreme head of the Church of England

Autumn 1536

The Pilgrimage of Grace,

a popular uprising against Henry's religious reforms, gathers widespread support in the Midlands and northern countries

12 October 1537

Prince Edward is born, giving Henry his much sought-after male heir. Sadly, Jane Seymour dies 12 days later, most likely from an infection caused by an unhygienic labour

12 July 1545

Henry marries Katherine Parr, his sixth and final wife



# The INSIDER



As a long-serving ambassador to the Tudor court, Eustace Chapuys was in the rare position of meeting all of Henry VIII's consorts. **Lauren Mackay** uncovers the surprising revelations that his writings uncover about Henry's six wives

## 1 Catherine of Aragon

*From beautiful warrior queen to desolate estranged wife*

Catherine of Aragon was the daughter of the power couple of Europe, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, and aunt to the powerful Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. She was reputedly a blue-eyed, red-haired beauty who captured Henry's heart, only to be discarded after 24 years of marriage when Henry met Anne Boleyn.

Catherine vehemently resisted attempts by Henry to replace her with Anne as his wife and queen, but

she could not do this alone

Catherine needed a legal mind,

who possessed diplomatic shrewdness and cool

Chapuys felt a strong sense of duty to Catherine and continued to advise her up until her death

reasoning, someone who could argue her cause before the king and maintain cordial relations between Charles V and Henry. That man was Eustace Chapuys, a gifted lawyer and diplomat at Charles's court.

Following a particularly successful mediation between the royal Hapsburg family and the independent Duchy of Savoy, this accomplished Savoyard from the small town of Annecy in what is now south-east France was appointed imperial ambassador to the Tudor court.

It is through Chapuys' dispatches that she is revealed as a fearless warrior queen – one who defeated the Scots in battle in 1513 – and a vulnerable, desolate wife.

Catherine's admiration of Chapuys is evident in her correspondence with Charles: "You could not have chosen a better ambassador, his wisdom encourages and comforts me, and when my councillors through fear hesitate to answer the charges against me, he is always ready to undertake the burden of my defence... I consider him deserving of all your favour."

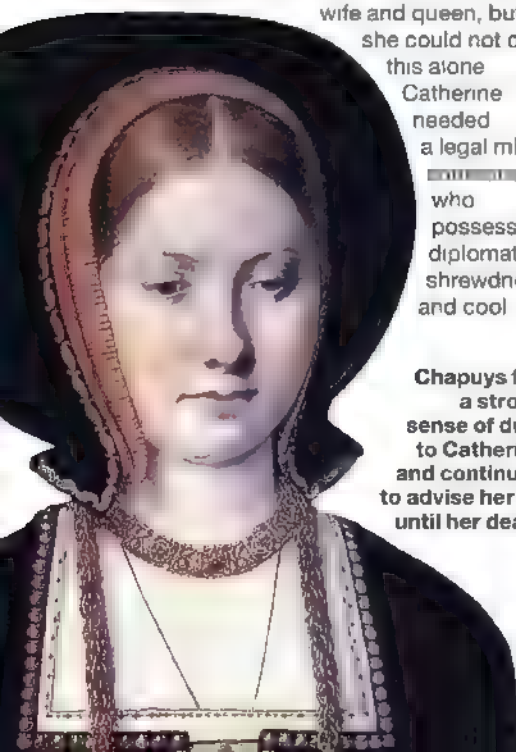
Catherine was cast aside by her husband and eventually neglected by her

nephew Charles. And so Chapuys became her advisor, advocate, life coach and window to the world.

In 1536, with Catherine clearly ailing, Chapuys rushed to her bedside to once again rally her spirits. He reported on what would be their last meeting: "She was pleased, out of sheer kindness and benevolence, and without any occasion or merit on my part, to thank me for the many services which, she said, I had rendered her on former occasions, as well as the trouble I had taken in coming down to visit her, at a time too when, if it should please God to take her to Himself, it would at least be a consolation to die as it were in my arms, and not all alone like a beast."

Catherine died at Kimbolton Castle in Cambridgeshire as Chapuys was returning to London. In his final, intensely personal report he reveals his deep affection for a woman who, in his view, could never be replaced as Queen of England.

*"Chapuys reveals his deep affection for a woman who, in his view, could never be replaced as Queen of England"*





## 2 Anne Boleyn

*A beguiling combination of intelligence, insecurity and relentless ambition*

Anne Boleyn's elusive personality and contradictory reputation continue to enthrall us, but it is through Chapuys' dispatches that she emerges as an enticingly unique creature: intelligent, impetuous and ambitious.

Anne was a tempest of life. She was rash and bold, and often quarrelled violently with Henry. We have Chapuys to thank for preserving several of the most quoted and evocative of Anne's outbursts as he deftly captured her moods, her insecurities and growing frustrations as queen-in-waiting: "I see that some fine morning you [Henry]... will cast me off. I have been waiting long, and might in the meanwhile have contracted some advantageous marriage... but alas! Farewell to my time and youth spent to no purpose at all."

Chapuys' opposition to Anne Boleyn has so often been construed as a mark of his opposition to Lutheranism and the English Reformation. However, it was his commission as ambassador to attempt to reconcile Catherine and Henry, and to restore Catherine to her rightful place on the throne of England. He could therefore hardly have been a supporter of Anne, regardless of her religious leanings.

Chapuys also offers us an insight into Anne's downfall, caused by the machinations of Henry and his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell. Chapuys and Cromwell had an intense and complex relationship, a mixture of rivalry and mutual admiration, yet Chapuys could not shake from his mind how instrumental Cromwell had been in Anne's downfall.

Crucially, Chapuys addressed the charge which has long stained Anne's reputation and that of her brother: the accusation

of incest. He refused to believe a word of it, reporting that "no proof of his guilt was produced except that of his having once passed many hours in her company, and other little follies".

Whatever he felt about Anne's treatment of Catherine and her daughter, Chapuys believed that the execution of Anne, and the five men condemned with her, was unconscionable — in his view they were innocent of the charges.

Although not present at the executions, Chapuys provides one of the vital narratives of the bloody events. His final entry on Anne is a testament to the woman he thought her to be: "No one ever showed more courage or greater readiness to meet death than she did... When orders came from the king to have [her execution] delayed until to-day, she seemed sorry... since she was well disposed and prepared for death, she should be dispatched immediately."

His words are honest and heartfelt in their admiration.

Chapuys' opposition to Anne Boleyn is well known, yet he did not believe she was guilty of the charges brought against her

## 3 Jane Seymour

*Adept at managing the king - without him realising it*

Popular perceptions of Jane Seymour range from either a simple, soft-spoken, subservient woman of whom Henry would eventually have tired, or a shrewd young woman who snared a monarch. Chapuys however, recognised her skillfulness in managing Henry without him realising it.

Chapuys' first impressions of Jane were of a woman "of middle stature and no great beauty, so fair that one would call her rather pale than otherwise. She is over 25 years old... not a woman of great wit, but she may have good understanding."

Chapuys' observations suggest that, while Jane may not have been of great intellect, she may have been more astute than she let on. Though lacking Anne Boleyn's beauty, she nevertheless possessed an easy grace and innocence.

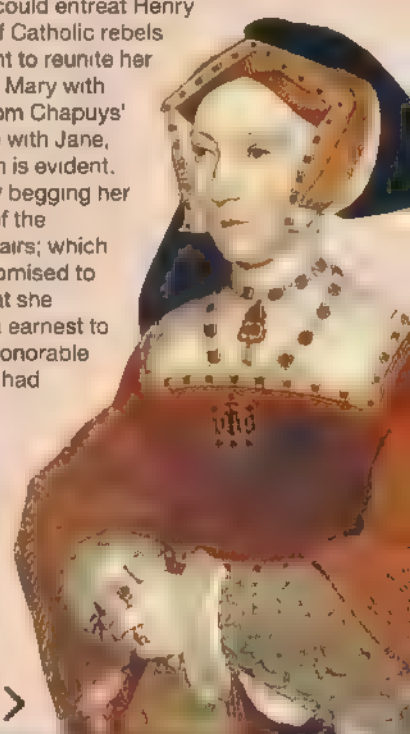
Chapuys keenly appreciated the mutual affection and loyalty that developed between Jane and Mary, Henry's daughter from his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

From Chapuys' accounts of Jane, we gain an insight into a quiet, determined woman who could entreat Henry for the lives of Catholic rebels as well as fight to reunite her stepdaughter Mary with her father. From Chapuys' first audience with Jane, his admiration is evident.

"I ended by begging her to take care of the princess's affairs; which she kindly promised to do, saying that she would work in earnest to deserve the honorable name which I had given her of pacificator."

Chapuys provides a sympathetic image of Jane, mediator, queen and mother of Henry's only male heir.

Jane Seymour c1536. Her easy grace and quiet determination served her well in Henry's court, and she gave him the desired male heir



# 4 Anne of Cleves

*Not so dim, ugly and socially inept as Henry would have us believe*

Chapuys was in Brussels for the first six months of 1540, and missed Henry's disastrous and brief marriage to Anne of Cleves. Our glimpses of her during this time are few and limited to Henry's damning observations: dim, ugly and socially inept.

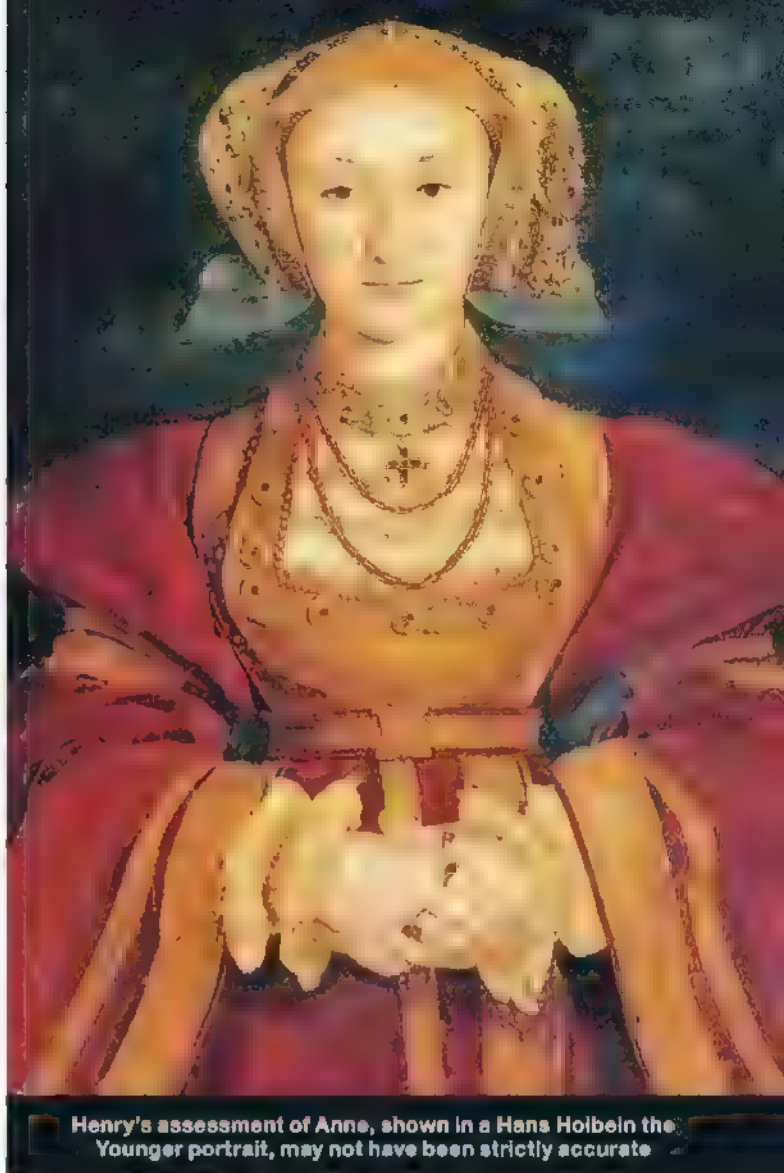
Thankfully, the real Anne becomes more illuminated through Chapuys' constant stream of dispatches following her divorce from Henry. Anne was reported to be a statuesque, slender, woman, "of middling beauty, with determined and resolute countenance".

It was during Christmas 1541 that Chapuys first set eyes on Anne of Cleves. He wrote that she made a

supremely dignified entrance at Hampton Court, where she met her successor as queen, Catherine Howard. "Having entered the room, Lady Anne approached the queen with as much reverence and punctilious ceremony as if she herself were the most insignificant damsel about court."

Chapuys was well aware of Anne's reformist inclinations. But on a personal level his reports are generous in their admiration, and he was pleased to see the genuine warmth between her and Henry's daughter Mary.

Anne was a true survivor. She would outlive Henry and go on to experience her stepdaughter Mary's reign



Henry's assessment of Anne, shown in a Hans Holbein the Younger portrait, may not have been strictly accurate

*"Chapuys' reports of Anne are generous. He was pleased to see the warmth between her and Henry's daughter Mary"*



# 5 Catherine Howard

*All she wanted to do was please those around her - but she failed in one critical respect*

Of Anne of Cleves's successor, Catherine Howard, popular culture has left us an image of a pretty, vapid, ineffectual young woman whose allegedly unbridled sexuality would be her undoing. Chapuys, however, saw her vulnerability and the precarious position into which she was forced. He shifts the focus to more significant aspects of her nature, namely her relationship with Henry, the firm hold her relatives had on her, and her earnest desire to please those around her.

Often dismissed as a queen with little power or political sway, she is viewed as

**Catherine Howard was at the mercy of her ambitious family and a king who wished to mould her into the ideal queen**

more of a trophy wife admired by her considerably older husband. But this is not the Catherine of Chapuys' letters. He perceived that Henry's intention was to mould Catherine into the ideal Tudor queen, something that had eluded him for a number of years.

From her inauguration festivities, Chapuys keenly observed her role: "[She] took occasion and courage to beg and entreat the king for the release of Maistre Huyet (Thomas Wyatt) a prisoner in the said Tower, which petition the king granted."

Catherine won the hearts of her subjects, her predecessor and, to an extent, Chapuys himself, but he regretted that she and Mary had a fractious relationship, Mary was around five years older than her new stepmother



# 6 Katherine Parr

*A shrewd political operator and a calming foil for Henry's rages*

By the time Henry married his sixth and final wife, Katherine Parr, Chapuys and the rest of Europe were almost indifferent to his penchant for weddings. But by then, Chapuys was beginning to feel his age. He worried constantly that Mary would have no one to promote her claim to the Tudor throne after he was gone. He could not have been more relieved, then, upon meeting Katherine Parr for the first time, to find her graceful, a good role model for Mary, and a calming foil for Henry's increasingly bad temper.

Chapuys was thrilled to report that she was a firm supporter of Mary's rehabilitation at court; it seemed that she was to pick up where Jane Seymour had left off.

Katherine also displayed a certain political acumen, which was evident in her efforts to maintain good relations with the Holy Roman Emperor (still Charles V). Chapuys trusted that Katherine would do all she could to preserve this alliance.

From his first real audience with Katherine, the ambassador had a chance to observe Mary and her new stepmother together. He was gratified to see a genuine affection between the two women and thanked Katherine for the "good offices which she had always exercised towards the

preservation of friendship between your majesty and the king; and also thanked her for the favour she showed to the Lady Mary".

Katherine warmly assured Chapuys that his words were too kind, but that it was her affection and duty to Mary that influenced her; indeed, she wished she could do more. Chapuys was thoroughly conquered by Katherine's modest response.

One of Chapuys' last dispatches brings to life their touching farewell audience. Despite his crippling gout, Chapuys was determined to show Katherine and Mary his respect and devotion, and remained standing despite the severe pain he was in. Katherine could see his discomfort and anxiously insisted that he be seated.

She was one of the few at Henry's court who acknowledged Chapuys' great service to England. The ambassador was able to leave England (he moved to the now Belgian town of Louvain in 1545, and died 11 years later). At last he felt he had discharged his mission entrusted to him by Catherine of Aragon all those years ago ■

***"Katherine displayed a certain political acumen, which was evident in her efforts to maintain good relations with Charles V"***



**Chapuys was pleased to see the genuine affection between Katherine Parr and Mary. She was also one of the few to acknowledge Chapuys' service to England**

Within two years, Catherine would be executed for adultery with two men: Francis Dereham, with whom she was involved before her marriage to Henry, and Thomas Culpepper – although, in the case of the latter, there is no evidence that the affair went beyond words.

Catherine's last weeks are meticulously recorded by the ambassador, including a peculiar request that the executioner's block be sent to her room. "In the same evening she asked to see the block, pretending that she wanted to know how she was to place her head on it. This was granted, and the block being brought in, she herself tried and placed her head on it by way of experiment."

Even in death, Catherine had not wanted to disappoint anyone.

Lauren Mackay is a historian based at the University of Newcastle in Australia, currently researching her PhD on Thomas and George Boleyn. She is the author of *Inside the Tudor Court: Henry VIII and His Six Wives Through the Writings of the Spanish Ambassador Eustace Chapuys* (Amberley, 2014)

QVINO METATIS

# THE DECLINE OF HENRY

What caused the muscular prince of chivalry to turn into a bloated, ruthless monarch with little care for his subjects?

**Robert Hutchinson** asks if his dramatic change in personality and appearance could have been as a result of having contracted Cushing's Syndrome





Henry VIII in his later years. By this time his face had a bloated look and his waist had grown to 54 inches. The monarch now weighed about 25 stone

SVÆ XLIX



## Henry VIII / Decline

**K**ing Henry VIII's body became huge in his last years. As a young man in 1514, his armour demonstrates he was six feet two inches in height, had a trim waist of 35 inches and a chest diameter of 42 – a powerful, muscular picture of chivalry.

By the early 1540s, measurements for new armour confirm that Henry's waist had swelled to a gargantuan 54 inches and his chest to 58. He probably weighed more than 28 stone. Gone were the magnificent propaganda images painted five years earlier, showing the barrel-chested king in three-quarter view, an imperious Henry at the peak of his powers – the first English monarch to use the word majesty. No wonder Spanish ambassador Eustace Chapuys wrote of Henry in a despatch home: "He has no respect or fear of anyone in the world."

Half a decade later there had been a dramatic metamorphosis. Now the artist portrays him honestly as a pathetic, hugely overweight old man. His small eyes peer out pig-like from a jowled, lined face. He holds a heavy embossed staff in his left hand for support. He personifies geriatric decay.

Research among the thousands of documents relating to Henry's reign that survive in Britain's archives has enabled a new analysis of his health as reported by his officials and the gossipy foreign ambassadors. This strongly suggests that Henry's change in appearance was due to a rare disease he may have contracted – Cushing's Syndrome.

The known behavioural symptoms closely match these reports of the king's behaviour: the mood swings, the unexplained sudden changes in his decisions, his suspicions about those around him and his emotional isolation. (See box on page 53). Cushing's Syndrome would have turned him into a psychotic paranoid and aggravated his already unpredictable temper. Bodily, his vastly increased weight, constant constipation and the throbbing of his headaches and ulcerated leg meant that for the remaining months of his life he was lugged around the royal apartments in the "king's tram" – a kind of sedan chair.

The strutting courtiers around him endured a precarious existence, living under the cosh of his erratic temper and overdeveloped ego. Dread of sudden disfavour always pervaded Henry's many sumptuous royal palaces and houses, like an unseen contagion. But from the start of



Holbein's painting of Henry VIII handing over a charter to the physician Thomas Vicary in 1541, commemorating the joining of the Barbers' and Surgeons' Guild.

### "The strutting courtiers around him lived under the cosh of his erratic temper"

the 1540s, the onset of disease and its dramatic effects must have made his court a place of even greater fear and terror among the most powerful in the land. One moment they could be riding high in the king's esteem, the next moment arrested by the captain of the guard on a trumped-up charge of treason or heresy.

Life or death, poverty or wealth, could hang on the irascible whim of a king both wracked with pain and frustrated by the limitations imposed by old age and this insidious disease – or the Machiavellian plots hatched by the politico-religious court factions to further their own quest for power and influence. As the king grew infirm and neared his end, the royal obsession with treachery and heresy could now be exploited by his devious advisors.

Sir Anthony Denny, the king's confidante (and, as chief gentleman of the Privy Chamber, the supplier of Henry's most intimate needs), told his friend Roger Ascham, tutor to Princess Elizabeth: "The

court ... is a place so slippery that duty never so well done is not a staff stiff enough to stand by always very surely; where you shall many times reap most unkindness where you have sown greatest pleasures and those also ready to do you much hurt, to whom you never intended to think any harm."

No one was entirely safe from the intrigues. Almost certainly encouraged by Bishop Stephen Gardiner, leader of the powerful conservative group at court, in 1543 some of the canons of Canterbury Cathedral accused Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of encouraging heretical sermons. As he was rowed upriver on his royal barge one evening, Henry saw Cranmer standing outside the gates of his palace at Lambeth. The vessel pulled into the bank and the king's greeting stunned the archbishop: "Ah, my chaplain! I have news for you. I know now who is the greatest heretic in Kent." He pulled the paper listing the accusations against





Cranmer from his sleeve and showed it to him. The king liked Cranmer and, with a neat sleight of hand, Henry appointed him to head the inquiry into the accusations against himself. All were pardoned.

The attacks on those closest to him, and his unpredictable changes of mind, bear all the hallmarks of a sufferer from Cushing's Syndrome. An example of this is the extraordinary escape of Cranmer, again the conservative conspirators' target, probably in November 1545. The king had suddenly agreed to his arrest for heresy, planned the next day during a Privy Council meeting. But that night Henry sent Denny, his ubiquitous 'fixer', to summon Cranmer. According to contemporary accounts, the archbishop met the king in a darkened gallery of the Palace of Westminster and heard of the plot against him. Henry told him: "I have granted their requests but whether I have done well or not, what say you my lord?"

Cranmer was prepared to be held in the Tower and to be tried because he believed Henry would not allow an unfair hearing. The king tried to convince him of the threat he now faced: "What fond simplicity you have! If you permit yourself to be imprisoned, your every enemy may take advantage of you ... Whilst at liberty, [no-one] dares to open their lips or appear

## CUSHING'S SYNDROME - THE REASON FOR HENRY'S EXTREME PARANOIA?

Research suggests he may have contracted the illness

Henry's physicians fought desperately in their efforts to keep the 55-year-old monarch alive as he became increasingly unwell in his final years. The king had become bloated and noticeably obese, black-funnels almost rarely seen in public. He had a lump on his leg, but it wasn't just that which pinned him. Henry was suffering from something far more threatening. He was perhaps a victim of the endocrine abnormality Cushing's Syndrome, as first proposed by Gifford Brewer's 2000 book *The Death of Kings*.

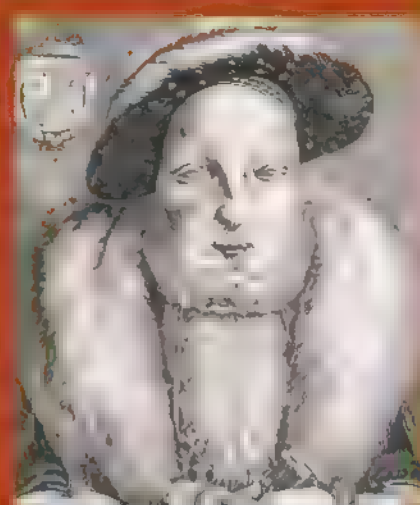
Symptoms of the disease are many, but victims may suffer from obesity, in the form of increased fat around their necks and a buffalo hump on the back. The face becomes swollen with subcutaneous fat deposits on the lower half beneath the eyes. Skin becomes fragile and thin, bruising easily, with slow, poor healing of wounds or lesions (as with Henry's leg).

Irregularity, depression, anxiety, weakness and sudden mood swings become common place in around 20 per cent of cases; the sufferer becomes psychotic and paranoid with a deep suspicion of everything and everyone. Suffering recurrent headaches and chronic fatigue, the victim is quarrelsome and aggressive. Men become impotent.

After the passage of many years, untreated, the diagnosis is the least purely anecdotal reports can be 100 per cent certain. But all these symptoms, as well as the descriptions by courtiers of Henry's condition in the last four years of his life.

King Henry did suffer from obesity in his trunk and lower face; he did experience melancholy and severe headaches; he also displayed fear, anger and aggression. He was sometimes detached from those he was fond of, as demonstrated by the warrants he probably signed for Archbishop Cranmer and Queen Katherine Parr. He did have mood swings and sudden changes of mind such as his decision to inform Cromwell and Parr of the conspiracies against them. An illustration in his *Prayer Book* in the British Library suggests that Henry had a lump on his back.

Cushing's Syndrome is caused by long periods of excessive levels of the hormone cortisol, secreted



This image of Henry aged about 56 shows his swollen face

by the adrenal glands in the body. This condition, which can affect 10 to 15 people per million, is caused by hormone-inhibiting drugs, chemotherapy or radiation treatment. The problem is invariable to Henry's physicians Wendy, Cromwell and Brewer in the mid-16th century.

It has often been claimed that Henry suffered from syphilis, and may even have died from this sexually transmitted disease. Supporters of this theory point out a varicose ulcer Henry suffered in 1527-8 was a broken-down gumma, a swelling, a symptom of tertiary syphilis. However, the thigh is an unusual location for this; moreover, gummas are not normally painful, whereas the king suffered great agony. Modern doctors could have recognised a gumma and treated Henry accordingly.

Syphilis can damage a foetus, so the marriages and offspring of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn are also cited as evidence of Henry's infection. But there is no evidence of syphilis in any of his children: Mary, Elizabeth and Edward were all free from its visible stigmata. In the 16th century treatment of the French Disease consisted of a series of sweating and successive doses of mercury, which made the mouth red and sore and created scaly skin flares called 'fimbriae'. Ambassadors would have spotted either the king's prolonged absence or the visible signs of the treatment. Neither was reported.

It is probable that Henry suffered from varicose ulcers. More seriously, it is likely that injuries to his legs damaged the blood and also caused chronic arthritis, painful bone infection,

## THE TURBULENT LATER YEARS

**May 1544**

English forces sack **Edinburgh**

**14 July 1544**

Henry goes to war in France and in September Boulogne surrenders. War drives England's economy into deficit

**February 1545**

Henry launches a pre-emptive strike against the Scots. His **forces are defeated** at Ancrum Moor

**July 1545**

French troops land on the Isle of Wight but are driven off in a few days

**November 1545**

A plot against the reforms of **Archbishop Cranmer** (right) emerges

**4 July 1546**

Charges against **Katherine Parr** are drawn up; Henry later has a change of heart

**November 1546**

Bishop Stephen Gardiner is **excluded from court**

**12 December 1546**

The Earl of Surrey and his father, the Duke of Norfolk, are **arrested and taken to the Tower**

**19 January 1547**

The **Earl of Surrey** is executed for treason

**27 January 1547**

The Bill of Attainder against the Earl of Surrey and the Duke of Norfolk is given Royal Assent. **Henry receives communion** from his confessor at mid-morning. He dies at about 2am the following morning

**31 January 1547**

Three days after his father's death **Edward VI is proclaimed king** at the Tower of London

before your face." He gave the archbishop his ring saying: "Show them that when they order your arrest, and all will be well."

The next morning, the Privy Council kept Cranmer waiting "among serving men and lackeys above three-quarters of an hour". Eventually, he was summoned and told that a "great complaint" had been made that he and others "by his permission, had infected the whole realm with heresy and therefore it was the king's pleasure that they should commit him to the Tower and be examined for his trial". Cranmer replied: "I am sorry my lords that you drive me to this exigency – to appeal from you to the king's majesty, who, by this token has taken this matter into his own hands and discharges you thereof" and he held up Henry's ring. The king taunted them: "Ah! My lords, I had thought that

I had a discreet and wise council but now I perceive that I am deceived. How have you handled my lord of Canterbury here? What makes you [treat him like] a slave, shutting him out of the council chamber amongst serving men?" Then he became serious:

"I believe Canterbury as faithful a man towards me as ever was prelate in this realm ... therefore, who so loves me will regard him [so] thereafter."

Another example of the unpredictable effects of Henry's declining health came with the conservative faction's plot to destroy his sixth wife, the increasingly evangelical Katherine Parr, whom they felt threatened their aspirations for regency of Henry's son, Edward, after his death. They launched a whispering campaign against her in early 1546. Katherine felt under threat. Her household accounts record orders in February for secure boxes to prevent any prying into her papers. Some of her more controversial religious books were hidden or smuggled into the safekeeping of her uncle at his house in Horton, Northamptonshire.

Henry frequently talked with her about religious issues. In late June that year, she went too far and her arguments irritated the king, already feeling melancholy and too unwell to go to Mass. After she retired to bed, Henry turned to Gardiner and snapped crossly: "A good hearing it is when women become such clerks [priests] and a thing much to my comfort to come in my old days to be taught by a woman!"

Here was the chance for the bishop to strike. He told the king that the queen's views were heresy under law and that he "could, within a short time, disclose such treasons cloaked with this heresy that his majesty would easily perceive how perilous a matter it is to cherish a serpent within his own bosom".

Henry himself probably signed the warrant for Katherine's arrest. The heresy charges against her were probably drawn up by 4 July. Four days later, a proclamation prohibited ownership of heretical books, providing a legal basis for the jaws of the trap about to snap shut on Katherine.

Then Henry, in another inexplicable change of mind, confided the plans for his wife's arrest to one of his doctors, and a copy of the warrant was conveniently dropped in the corridor of the queen's apartments. Katherine quickly knew about the plot to burn her at the stake. That evening, probably on 13 July, she went to the royal bedchamber; Henry began to discuss religion, and she snatched her chance. She was "but a poor silly woman, accompanied by all the imperfections natural to the weakness of her sex," she said, and would defer her judgement "to your majesty's wisdom, as my only anchor, supreme head and governor here on earth, next unto God, to lean unto".

"Not so, by Saint Mary," Henry said pointedly. "You are become a doctor Kate, to instruct us ... and not to be instructed or directed by us." She flattered him and humbled herself. "If your majesty take it so, then has your majesty very much mistaken me, for I have always held it preposterous for a woman to instruct her lord. If I have presumed to differ with your highness on religion it was partly to obtain information for my own comfort regarding nice points on which I stood in doubt." Henry replied: "And is it even [so] sweetheart? And tended your arguments to no worse end? Then perfect friends are we now, as ever any time heretofore." She was safe.

The next afternoon, Henry and Katherine were sitting in the Privy Gardens. He was "as pleasant as ever he was in all his life before" but Henry's mood changed swiftly as Lord Chancellor Wriothesley, with 40 halberdiers, entered the gardens. He had come at the appointed hour to arrest the queen. Henry pulled Wriothesley aside and he fell on his knees before the king and reminded him of the previously agreed arrangements for the arrest. An angry Henry shouted: "Arrant knave! Beast and fool!" Some accounts said he cuffed the Lord Chancellor around the





## “Around **150,000** of Henry’s hapless subjects **died by execution** or civil unrest”

head. Henry ordered Wriothesley to “avaunt [leave] my sight” and turned his back on him.

The minor poet and evangelical Sir George Blagge, one of Henry’s cronies, was also detained in Newgate and sentenced at the Guildhall that summer to be burnt after being accused of heresy. But Blagge, who laboured under the king’s nickname of “my pig”, was freed, again through the personal intervention of the king. When Henry next saw him at court, he called out: “Ah, my pig! Are you safe again?” Blagge replied: “Yes, sire. And if your majesty had not been better to me than your bishops, your pig had been roasted ere this time.”

He was not always so merciful. Around 150,000 of his hapless subjects died by execution or in civil unrest during the 37 years of his reign, an estimate based on surviving county assize lists of death sentences and other reports. A

contemporary chronicler wrote of the last years of Henry’s reign: “It is now no novelty among us to see men slain, hung, drawn, quartered, beheaded. Some for trifling expressions, which were explained or interpreted as having been spoken against the king; others for the Pope’s supremacy; some for one thing, some for another.”

And when English forces invaded Scotland in 1544, their commander was told that Henry’s pleasure “was that you shall put to fire and the sword” all the communities along the shores of the Forth estuary and burn Edinburgh “without taking either the castle or town to mercy, though they would yield, for you know the falsehood of them all”. In modern terms, it was genocide.

In September 1540, during a stay at Windsor Castle, Henry found the plague raging in the town outside its walls. In a similarly callous act, he ordered the sick to

be taken from their beds and carried to fields alongside the Thames to die, to prevent infection spreading to his court.

While remaining very much an orthodox and devout Catholic in many aspects of doctrine and liturgy, Henry veered to and fro between executing members of both the evangelical and conservative factions – sometimes as heretics, more often as traitors – as well as staging very public bonfires of profane books, the last on 26 September 1546. A total of 81 heretics were burnt during his last ten years, compared with two in the short reign of his son, 280 in Mary I’s fiery campaign against Protestants and just four by Elizabeth.

Henry died on 28 January 1547. The fear and dread of Henry’s reign had gone. As that archetypal civil servant, Sir William Paget, told Somerset in December 1548: “Under Henry VIII, all men feared to speak, though the meaning were not evil. Now every man has the liberty to speak without danger.” ■

**Robert Hutchinson** is a historian and archaeologist specialising in the Reformation, and author of *The Last Days of Henry VIII* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009).

### LUCKY FOOL: HOW A HUMP-BACKED MAN WON OVER THE KING

**Somers outwitted Wolsey and gained the king’s trust**

Will Somers, King Henry’s nimble fool (jester) strikes a note of sanity amid his ageing master’s frequent bouts of irrational anger. This hump-backed little man with his pet monkey was probably the only man trusted totally by Henry. His ability to make the sad, pained old man laugh enabled him to tell the king things that others would not dare to – and yet survive.

Soon after coming to court, Somers cheekily cheated Henry’s then chief minister, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, out of £10. The fool entered the royal apartments as the king and cardinal were discussing state business, and announced that Wolsey’s creditors were outside, demanding their money. The cardinal pompously said he would forfeit his head if he owed any man a penny, but gave Somers £10 in gold on the promise that it would be paid to



Henry shown playing the harp with his trusty fool Will Somers c1540

whom it was due. Somers later returned and asked Wolsey: “To whom do you owe your soul?” “To God” came his reply. Somers followed up: “And your wealth?” “To the poor,” said the cardinal piously. Then, said the fool quickly, “Wolsey’s head was forfeit to the king – to the poor at the gate I paid the debt which he agrees is due”. Henry laughed at the joke and the cardinal appeared amused, but it grieved him to give away

£10 – equivalent to £4,000 today.

Thomas Wilson, in his *Art of Rhetorique* published in 1551 or 1553, quotes some repartee between Somers and the king – who was then, as always, in need of hard cash. The fool told him “you have so many frauditors, so many conveyers and so many deceivers, clever puns on auditors, surveyors and receivers – Tudor government officials that they get all to themselves.”

1547-53

# EDWARD VI

## THE YOUNG REFORMER



Edward VI was just nine years old when he was crowned king. Yet, whether through his own initiative or that of his advisers, significant religious reform was made during the period.



## Despite his short rule, Edward VI found ample time to steer England towards Protestantism, explains **Ralph Houlbrooke**

**A**t the coronation of Edward VI in Westminster Abbey in February 1547, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer supposedly urged the nine-year-old supreme head of the church to follow the example of Josiah, the young king of ancient Judah, in seeing God truly worshipped and idolatry destroyed.

Cranmer's exhortation was a sign of things to come: far from reversing Henry VIII's break with Rome, Edward would go on to quicken the pace of his father's religious reforms. The result was that England would, for the first time, become an officially Protestant country during the six-year reign of the boy king.

Henry VIII had ended the pope's ecclesiastical supremacy, but he kept the mass. Edward didn't share his father's devotion to a rite that, for Protestants, was the prime example of idolatry, and in 1547 the Chantries Act condemned intercessory masses for the dead. Then the 1548 Order of Communion and the two prayer books of 1549 and 1552 cut the heart out of the mass and finally abolished it altogether. English replaced Latin in parish church services, while the removal of a host of 'idolatrous' religious images, abolition of many 'superstitious' ceremonies, and replacement of stone altars by communion tables transformed the outward face of religion.

### **Fervent reform**

Edward remained a minor throughout his reign. His maternal uncle Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, was protector of the king's realms from 1547 to 1549. He combined strong support for religious reform with a resolve to address social and economic ills such as the supposedly widespread enclosure of land for conversion to pasture. His 1547 invasion of Scotland resumed the 'rough wooing' begun by Henry VIII in order to achieve Mary

Stewart's marriage to Edward. Seymour also tried to enlist Scottish support for an ambitious vision of a united and Protestant Britain. However, French help for the Scots ensured the plan's failure.

Unsettling religious changes and economic grievances triggered a formidable wave of rebellions in 1549. Somerset's sympathetic response to some economic demands, coupled with his arrogance towards his fellow councillors, led in October to his arrest at Windsor and removal from the protectorship. John Dudley, created Duke of Northumberland in 1551, led the government as lord president of the privy council from February 1550.

Edward's now fervent Protestantism encouraged Northumberland to support reformers more militant than Cranmer, especially John Hooper, who wanted to get rid of surviving elements of Catholic priestly dress, and John Knox, who bitterly criticised the retention of kneeling to receive holy communion in the 1552 prayer book.

In March 1551 the 13-year-old king told his Catholic elder sister Mary that he could no longer bear her disobedience in having mass celebrated in her household. His strong feelings on the issue embarrassed his advisers when the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Mary's cousin, allegedly threatened war if she were not allowed her mass. Needing insurance against Charles's hostility, in July 1551 the government agreed a treaty with France providing for Edward's eventual marriage to one of King Henri II's daughters. It now seemed safe to try once more to end Mary's mass and then arrest Somerset, who was tried for treasonable plotting and executed in January 1552. But Henri II was not a close or trusted ally. There were soon renewed fears of French schemes against England.

A sharp fall in English cloth exports during the early 1550s – when England's

relations with Charles V, overlord of Antwerp, London's main trading partner, were already frosty – prompted the formation of a partnership between London merchants and the court under Northumberland's patronage to finance a quest for new markets by way of the North-East Passage (along the Russian Arctic coast). The expedition that set off in May 1553, watched by Edward from Greenwich Palace, never reached China as intended, but resulted in the opening of a profitable trade with Russia. This venture, and the stimulus it gave to English advances in navigation and cartography, played a key part in launching the Elizabethan age of exploration.

### **The quest for a successor**

After the marriage treaty with France, Edward was encouraged to attend the privy council. In 1551–53 he wrote various papers demonstrating his close interest in the making of policy. In January 1553, however, he began to suffer from the illness that caused his death seven months later on 6 July.

At some stage Edward wrote a "devise for the succession" that omitted his sisters Mary and Elizabeth and, in its final form, made Lady Jane Grey his successor. Mary Tudor's fervent Catholicism was widely thought to be Edward's chief reason for altering the succession. However, the illegitimacy of both Mary and Elizabeth was the chief pretext mentioned in letters patent that gave effect to the devise.

We shall never know for certain whether Edward, Northumberland or some other adviser first planned the succession scheme. But the king clearly made it his own, and insisted upon it in the face of strong objections. ■

Ralph Houlbrooke taught history at the University of Reading. His books include *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (OUP, 1998)

# His father's son

Edward VI's reign tends to be seen as that of a young king at the mercy of his close confidantes. But, as **Chris Skidmore** argues, a fiercely independent streak was increasingly visible

**E**dward VI reigned for just six years, yet – despite succeeding his father at the age of only nine years old – from an early age he was groomed to become both the great hope of the Tudor age and one of the most impressive monarchs in Christendom. Understandably, the male heir for whom Henry VIII had cast aside both his elder sisters and the Catholic church was, his father wrote, “this whole realm's most precious jewel”.

Knowing Edward's eventual fate, it is perhaps hard to understand the spirit of optimism and hope that the young boy

brought to the nation upon his succession. Compared to the Old Testament boy-king Josiah, Edward was the first king to be born with the title Defender of the Faith as well as being crowned with the powers of royal supremacy.

Despite its brevity, that six-year reign is a strong contender for the most tumultuous period in 16th-century history. The political rivalries between the king's protector (his uncle, the Duke of Somerset) and John Dudley (later Duke of Northumberland) descended into moments where it seemed that civil war might be inevitable. High political drama was matched by a groundswell of popular rebellion two years into Edward's reign. Led by Robert Kett in Norfolk, the rising was fuelled by the enclosure of common land in Wymondham and rising prices. It was under Edward's reign that the Reformation would reach into the lives of ordinary men and women, who witnessed stone altars, shrines and statues of saints being broken up, and the mass replaced with communion, spoken for the first time in English.

Instability seemed to be the order of the day. Yet the events of his reign

should not detract from the growing potential that Edward himself showed as a ruler. In contrast to the popular image of the pale and sickly boy king, held prisoner by the wiles of his advisers, Edward showed increasing signs of an independence of mind and spirit, not to mention his unrivalled intellectual abilities.

## A boy of letters

Edward had been given the most extensive education money could buy. As a result, he became one of the best educated princes in Europe. He is the only English king to have kept a diary, or ‘journal’ as he termed it, now preserved in the British Library. Edward's school essays – more than 100, in Latin and Greek – also survive as evidence of his learning. From an early age, even before his accession as king, Edward demonstrated signs of extreme precocity – and a fiercely independent streak. His tutor Richard Cox, writing privately to Thomas Cranmer, believed he was of “such towardness in learning, godliness, gentleness and all honest qualities”.

Yet even Cox was forced at times to discipline the prince, who displayed a stubbornness and temper that was to characterise his own kingship, eventually resorting to using corporal punishment, giving Edward “such a wound that he wist [knew] not what to do”. When Edward

This illustration shows the young King Edward VI being advised by Archbishop Cranmer







A foreign envoy describing Edward VI said it was impossible "to imagine a more beautiful face and figure, set off by the brilliance of jewels and robes"



himself wrote to his stepmother, Katherine Parr, congratulating her on her own calligraphic hand, he boasted priggishly that he was “much surprised ... I hear too that your highness is progressing in the Latin tongue and into the *belles lettres* wherefore I feel no little joy, for letters are lasting”. Yet Edward’s early letters and exercise books point to one of the crucial dilemmas of the young king’s reign: where do the voices of his teachers and political advisers end and Edward’s own personality begin?

Certainly, early in his reign Edward could be easily influenced. His uncle, Thomas Seymour, effectively managed to bribe the king with pocket money, and planned to seize control of the king before his plot was foiled. After Seymour had told Edward he had become a “beggarly king”, Edward was himself heard to remark how his protector, the Duke of Somerset (Seymour’s brother), “dealeth very hardly with me, and keepeth

me so straight that I cannot have any money at my will”. It is perhaps telling that the impressionistic young king wanted the money not for himself but, rather, to reward the preachers to whose sermons he had listened intently at court.

Yet when Somerset himself was overthrown in a coup led by his rival the Duke of Northumberland, the king never seems to have forgiven him for seizing him and taking him to Windsor under an armed guard during the crisis. “Methinks I am in prison,” the king remarked. Two years later, when Somerset was executed for his continued plotting, Edward wrote coldly in his diary how his uncle “had his head cut off upon Tower Hill between eight and nine o’clock in the morning”.

### New influences

The ascendancy of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, as Lord President of Edward’s council marked a change in the

second half of Edward’s reign, as the king himself grew older and more prone to bouts of teenage tantrums. Northumberland’s success lay in recognising that Edward’s growing independence – and ego – needed to be massaged carefully. One account described how Edward regarded Northumberland “in the place of a father”.

A French observer described how Northumberland’s success lay in controlling the king’s Privy Chamber, with its members being “creatures of the duke”. In particular, Northumberland appointed his close friend Sir John Gates to control the dry stamp of the king’s signature. Gates became “the principal instrument which he used in order to induce the king to something”. Northumberland’s son-in-law, Sir Henry Sidney, was also a close friend of Edward’s and had “acquired so great an influence near the king that he was able to make all of his notions conform to those of the duke”. It was rumoured that





Henry VIII on his deathbed, pointing to his successor Edward VI, who is surrounded by his advisors. The pope lies crushed below Edward's feet under 'the words of the Lord'.

**“Where do the voices of his teachers and political advisers end and Edward’s own personality begin?”**

works in six languages), 27 classical texts and 33 works on reformed religion. John Foxe later claimed that Thomas Cranmer wept for joy at Edward’s ability to translate Latin and Greek, while he believed Edward was able not only to remember the name of every port and creek in the country, but also “the names of all his justices, magistrates, gentlemen that had any authority”. The Italian Hieronimo Cardano, visiting Edward in October 1552, considered that Edward “spoke Latin as politely and fluently as I did”, but remained reserved when commenting on the king’s intellectual abilities, stating that Edward had begun to “love and favour liberal arts and sciences, before he knew them, and to know them before he could use them”. Nevertheless, he believed it was “a miracle of nature, to behold the excellent wit and forwardness that appeared in him”.

Edward was growing in physical strength, too, and had begun to show an interest in the more traditional activities of kings. The imperial ambassador Jean Scheyfve noted how Edward “takes riding exercise and fences daily, without forgoing his studies, which are multiple, and concern especially the new religion ... He has begun to be present at the Council and to attend to certain affairs himself.” Later he wrote how Edward would practise “the use of arms every day on horseback, and enjoys it greatly”. The Venetian ambassador similarly reported how the king took part “in every sort of exercise, drawing the bow, playing rackets, hunting and so forth, indefatigably”.

Edward’s own life at court was not much different from the luxuries of any Tudor monarch. When a French embassy led by Jacques d’Albon, the marshal of France and Seigneur de Saint Andre, came to visit the king in the summer of 1551, investing Edward with the Order of St Michel, Edward’s excitement at the visit is detailed in his diary. “He came to see mine arraying and saw my bedchamber and went

Northumberland himself would pay secret visits to Edward at night, “unseen by anyone, after all were asleep”, so that Edward might appear in the council chamber the next day and propose matters of state, “as if they were his own; consequently, everyone was amazed, thinking that they proceeded from his mind and by his invention”.

In practice, Edward was slowly being prepared for the business of government. In March 1552 a special council, the ‘council for the estate’, was created for Edward to attend council meetings once a week. By the following January, a new set of articles for the running of the Privy Council set out how the king was to be kept fully informed of all council business at all times and was free “to hire the debating of any matters”.

Yet if Edward was determined to put his foot down, the council as powerless but to obey his wishes. When his sister Mary

refused to stop her household publicly saying mass, the council was willing to turn a blind eye to the princess’s disobedience, but Edward was not. In March 1551 he summoned her to court for an emotional showdown, which reduced both brother and sister to tears. “I had suffered her mass against my will,” Edward later wrote in his journal, but “could not bear it ... her example might breed too much inconvenience”. When his council attempted to reckon with the king, Edward refused outright, saying that he would “spend all his life, and all that he had, rather than agree and grant to what he certainly knew to be against the truth”. Edward had his way, and Mary was forced to hear mass only in private.

### Teenage kicks

By the time Edward had entered his teens, his learning was prodigious. His surviving library includes 72 books (comprising

### THE LIFE OF EDWARD VI

12 October 1537

28 January 1547

10 September 1547

January 1549

20 March 1549

2 February 1550

1552

June 1553

6 July 1553



**“The short-lived reign of ‘Queen Jane’ owes more to Edward’s own design than he has been given credit for”**

a-hunting with hounds and saw me shoot and all my guards shoot together. He dined with me, heard me play on the lute, ride, came to me in my study, supped with me.”

Meanwhile, the envoys were equally impressed with the young king’s attire, describing how it was impossible “to imagine a more beautiful face and figure, set off by the brilliance of jewels and robes, and a mass of diamonds, rubies and pearls, emeralds and sapphires – they made the whole room look as if lit up”.

#### **Growing into the role**

Edward’s own letters to his close friend Barnaby Fitzpatrick reveal a vivid insight into the mind of the young king. In early 1552, when Fitzpatrick was sent abroad on an embassy to France, Edward urged him “not to live too sumptuously as an ambassador ... read the Scripture or

some good book, and give no reverence to the mass at all ... For women, as far forth as you may, avoid their company. Yet if the French king commands you, you may sometimes dance, so measure be your mean. Else apply yourself to riding, shooting or tennis, with such honest games – not forgetting, sometimes, when you have leisure, your learning; chiefly reading the Scripture.”

In the summer of 1552, the king travelled on his first royal progress outside the capital. He wrote again to Fitzpatrick, boasting of his experiences: “Whereas you have been occupied in killing of your enemies, in long marchings, in painful journeys, in extreme heat, in sore skirmishing, in divers assaults; we have been occupied in killing of wild beasts, in pleasant journeys, in good fare, in viewing of fair countries.” Edward was





In this adaptation of a 19th-century illustration, Edward VI confirms his father's gift of Christ's Hospital to the city of London

emerging as a Tudor king very much in his father's mould

Then disaster struck. When Edward fell ill in January 1553, his decline was sudden. What started off as a cough soon turned into a severe infection: "The matter he ejects from his mouth," one observer wrote, "is sometimes coloured a greenish yellow and black, sometimes pink, like the colour of blood." By May it seemed that Edward's condition was terminal. "It is held for certain that he cannot escape," wrote the imperial ambassador Scheyfve.

Even in his dying days, Edward was determined to change the course of English history. Rather than allow his Catholic sister, Mary, to succeed the throne, he drew up his own last will and testament, directing that, after some careful consideration of the matter, his cousin Lady Jane Grey should instead become his heir. When many of his council refused to agree, Edward summoned them into his presence. One account of the meeting reveals a king determined to imprint his own authority. Edward addressed the audience "with sharp words and angry countenance" that he was convinced Mary



The Duke of Somerset is executed for treason. The duke was the king's protector and uncle

"would provoke great disturbances" and had resolved to "disown and disinherit her together with her sister Elizabeth, as though she were a bastard and sprung from an illegitimate bed".

Placing his religion ahead of the more traditional ties of inheritance, Edward seems to have been convinced that the future of the monarchy lay in upholding a Protestant succession independent from Rome. The events of July 1553, and the short-lived reign of 'Queen Jane', owe more to Edward's own designs than he has been given credit for.


Only premature death prevented Edward from seizing the full reins of power. What kind of monarch he would have become in

adulthood is a fascinating prospect. His growing interest in foreign affairs, and the ongoing battles against the Turks, suggests that he may have wished to resurrect the medieval image of the crusading king, fighting for his deeply cherished Protestant faith. Certainly, the creation of royal supremacy and his own position as head of the still-forming Church of England would have given Edward near absolutist powers. Had he lived, evidence suggests that he would have become one of England's most significant rulers. **17**

Chris Skidmore is an author, historian and MP for Kingswood. His books include *Edward VI: The Last King of England* (Orion, 2007)







# SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENT

The image of Lady Jane Grey, the abused young woman who was tragically executed, is encapsulated in a Victorian fraud. **Leanda de Lisle** examines whether there is truth behind the image of an innocent, virginal Jane

*The Execution of Lady Jane Grey (1833) by French Romantic painter Paul Delaroche dominates its display room at the National Gallery in London*

The teenage 'nine-day queen', Lady Jane Grey, has been mythologised – even fetishised – as the innocent victim of adult ambition. The legend was encapsulated by the

French Romantic artist Paul Delaroche in his 1833 historical portrait of Jane in white on the scaffold, an image with all the erotic overtones of a virgin sacrifice. But the legend also inspired a fraud – one that has fooled historians, art experts, and biographers, for over 100 years.

A 16th-century merchant gave us what was until now believed to be the only detailed contemporary description of Jane's appearance. In a letter, he wrote an eyewitness account of a smiling, red-haired girl being processed to the Tower as queen, on 10 July 1553. He was close enough to see that she was so small she had to wear stacked shoes or 'chopines' to give her height. Jane was overthrown nine days later and eventually executed in the Tower from where she had reigned. But though the tragedy of her brutal death at only 16 is real, the letter is an invention that obscures the significance of her reign.

The faked letter first made its appearance in Richard Patrick Boyle Davey's 1909 biography *The Nine Days Queen, Lady Jane Grey & her Times*. Davey's subject was already a popular one. The Victorians had lapped up the poignant tale of a child-woman forced to be queen and later executed as a usurper. The letter, 'discovered' by Davey in the archives of Genoa, seemingly brought this tragic heroine to life. But in retrospect that should have sent alarm bells ringing, because the Jane the Victorians knew was already heavily fictionalised.

The historical Jane was a great-grandchild of Henry VII. Highly intelligent and given a top-flight Protestant education, she might have made a queen consort to her fiercely Protestant cousin Edward VI, as her father hoped. But instead, on 6 July 1553, the dying Edward bequeathed her the throne in place of his Catholic half-sister, Mary Tudor. Thirteen days later Mary

overthrew Jane, who was duly tried for treason, found guilty and condemned.

Mary indicated she wished to pardon Jane. But Jane was nevertheless executed the following year. It was the aftermath to a rebellion in which she had played no part (although her father had). Why, then, did Mary sign Jane's death warrant? The reason was indicated the day before Jane's beheading. The bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, reminded Mary that it was leading Protestants who had opposed her rule in July 1553 and in the recent rebellion. As queen, Jane had condemned Catholicism, and she continued to do so as a prisoner in the Tower. As such, she posed a threat. It was for her religious stance that Jane would die – not solely for her father's actions, nor for her reign as a usurper.

Aware that the Protestant cause would be damaged by its link to treason, Jane reminded people from the scaffold that, though in law she was a traitor, she had merely accepted the throne she was offered, and was innocent of having sought it. From this kernel of truth the later image of Jane was spun. Protestant propagandists developed her claims to innocence, ascribing the events of 1553 to the personal ambitions of Jane's father and father-in-law rather than religion. Under Queen Elizabeth, treason was associated with Catholics, not Protestants, and the earlier history was forgotten.

The religious issue of 1553 concluded only in 1701, when it was made illegal for any Catholic to inherit the throne – a law that still stands. But Jane's story continued to develop. Her 'innocence' was associated increasingly with the passivity deemed appropriate in a young girl. The sexual dimension to this is evident in Edward's Young's 1714 poem *The Force of Religion*, which invited men to gaze as voyeurs on the pure Jane in her "private closet". Jane's mother Frances, meanwhile, was reinvented as a wicked queen to Jane's Snow White.

By the 19th century Jane's fictionalised life was enormously popular. But there was something still missing from her story: a face. With no contemporary images or



descriptions, the public had to be content with Jane as imagined by artists. The most striking work remains Paul Delaroche's painting *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey*, bequeathed to the nation by Lord Cheylesmore in 1902 and now displayed at the National Gallery in London. Jane, blindfold and feeling for the block, represents an apotheosis of female helplessness. Richard Davey seems to have spotted a need for an account of Jane's appearance that matches its power. He claimed to have found it in a letter in Genoa, composed by the merchant 'Sir Baptist Spinola'.

The letter has ever since been quoted in biographies and used to argue the merits of 'lost' portraits of Jane. But I was concerned that Davey was the sole source for this letter. Researching my triple biography *The*

GETTY IMAGES

**"Jane condemned Catholicism as queen and continued to do so as a prisoner. It was for her religious stance that Jane would die, not solely for her father's actions or her reign as a usurper"**





Following the death of Edward VI, nobles try to persuade Lady Jane Grey to take the crown. The man beside Jane is her husband, Lord Guildford Dudley.

*Sisters Who Would be Queen* (HarperPress, 2010), I discovered that Davey had invented evidence that Jane had a nanny and dresser with her in the Tower – characters inspired by earlier novels. I began a long search for the ‘Spinola’ letter, but never found it in Genoa or in any history predating 1909. It became clear that the letter is a fake that mixes details from contemporary sources with fiction.

There was a contemporary merchant called Benedict Spinola, and a soldier called Baptista Spinola. The description of Jane has echoes of the red-lipped girl in the Delaroche portrait, but resembles also a contemporary description of Mary Tudor, who was “of low stature... very thin; and her hair reddish”. In the letter Jane’s mother carries her train, as was observed in 1553. The platform shoes or ‘chopines’

were taken from the Victorian historian Agnes Strickland, quoting Isaac D’Israeli. I can find no earlier source. But they are suggestive of Jane’s physical vulnerability – an element in the appeal of the abused child woman that remains so popular (a recent novel even goes to far as to suggest that Jane was raped).

The rest of Jane’s dress, described by ‘Spinola’ as a gown of green velvet worn with a white headdress, was in colours traditionally worn by a monarch on the eve of their coronation. But they are also the colours of the illustration *Lady Jane Grey in Royal Robes*, published in Arden Holt’s 1882 *Fancy Dresses Described*. Significantly, in Davey’s *The Tower of London*, published in 1910, he describes Jane’s dress as edged in ermine, as it was in Holt’s illustration – a detail overlooked by ‘Sir Baptist Spinola’.

Davey’s lies and the repetition of old myths are damaging. Because Jane’s reign was treated for so long as the product of the ambitions of a few men, or of Edward VI’s naive hopes, it is regarded as a brief hiatus, of no consequence. But it is key to understanding the development of our constitutional history.

And we have overlooked something else, too. The Tudor unease with women who held power has never really gone away. In legend, Jane is the good girl, weak and feminine; Frances is a bad woman, powerful and mannish. This is the lesson of the myths – one that historians have too willingly accepted. **11**

Leanda de Lisle is a bestselling author. Her latest book is *Tudor: The Family Story* (Chatto & Windus, 2013)

1553-59

# MARY I

THE FORGOTTEN TRAILBLAZER



Queen Mary I of England and Ireland. Notorious for her burning of Protestants, Mary I achieved much during her reign, not least showing that a woman could rule the country.



## Anna Whitelock explains how the facade of 'Bloody Mary' hides a pioneering monarch who achieved everything she set out to

**M**ary was the Tudor trailblazer. Never before had a queen worn the crown of England. She won the throne against the odds, preserving the Tudor line of succession and establishing precedents for female rule. Her significance has long been overlooked.

Until recently Mary has been the forgotten Tudor, overshadowed by her famous sister, Elizabeth. She has been condemned as one of the most reviled women in history. 'Bloody Mary' is regarded as a bigoted, half-Spanish tyrant whose reign was an unmitigated failure notable only for the burning of nearly 300 Protestants and her unpopular marriage to Philip of Spain.

Mary was, of course, never meant to be queen, and her father, Henry VIII, had gone to great – even infamous – lengths to guard against her accession. Though Henry finally acknowledged Mary's claim to the throne in the last years of his reign, Edward VI ignored his father's will and, determined to preserve a Protestant church, wrote his Catholic sister out of the succession. Upon his death in July 1553 Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed queen. Ten days later, and against extraordinary odds, Mary won her rightful throne. The scale of her achievement is often overlooked. Mary had led the only successful revolt against central government in 16th-century England. She had eluded capture, mobilised a counter-coup and in the moment of crisis proved courageous, decisive and politically adept.

### Setting precedents

Yet despite her triumphant accession, Mary's status as England's first crowned queen was a matter of great speculation and uncertainty. Many questioned whether a woman could indeed wear the crown. The language, image and expectations

of English monarchy and royal majesty were unequivocally male. So in the following months the practice and power of a queen regnant were hammered out. It was a debate over which Mary presided and her decisions would become precedents for the future. The status of a queen regnant was laid out in a highly significant statute passed in the parliament of April 1554: "An Acte declaringe that the Regall power of thys realme is in the Quenes Maiestie as fully and absolutely as ever it was in anye her mooste noble progenytours kynges of thys Realme." The act made Mary's queenship equal in law to that of a king.

And so in statute, in ceremony and in ritual Mary drew on the precedents of her male predecessors and fashioned them for queenship. There was no guidance for the coronation of a woman as a ruler in her own right but Mary's ceremony invested her with all the power exercised by her ancestors. Mary notably revived the tradition of touching a sufferer of scrofula (known as the king's evil) and followed other practices such as blessing cramp rings (also used for healing) as well as washing the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday. Such rituals had never been performed by a woman and were considered priestly acts that only God's representative on earth, a male monarch, could perform.

Although inhabiting what was traditionally a male world of monarchy, the personality of the monarch continued to be the key to the determination and execution of policy. Mary was closely involved in government and the key policies of the reign – the marriage, the reunion with Rome and war with France. As the Venetian ambassador described, she rose "at daybreak when, after saying her prayers and hearing mass in private, she transacts business incessantly until after midnight".

Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain has long been seen as a failure, exemplified by

the loss in 1558 of Calais, England's last territory in France. In spite of this, Mary's marriage can be seen as a calculated and successful political act. She chose a husband distant from English disputes and intrigues, and his powers were carefully circumscribed by legislation and a highly favourable marriage treaty.

Mary defeated a rebellion against the Spanish marriage, again securing popular support in a moment of crisis. She refused to leave London and, in a speech at the Guildhall, attacked Thomas Wyatt, the rebel leader, as a wicked traitor, defended her religion and choice of husband, and called on Londoners to stand firm in support: "I doubt not but we shall give these rebels a short and speedy overthrow." The rebels were compelled to lay down their arms and to sue for mercy. In her speech Mary promised to submit the treaty before the people for ratification – a step her male predecessors had never taken.

Mary's reign is, of course, most noted for the burning of nearly 300 men, women and children. Though this cannot and should not be expunged from accounts of her reign, it is important to consider the wider context and her religious policy more generally.


The restoration of Catholicism was neither inept nor backward-looking. The most notorious aspect of the reign – the burnings – proved devastatingly effective. If Mary had lived, or if she had managed to produce a Catholic heir, there seems little doubt that England would have been successfully recatholicised and the historical judgement on Mary would have been very different.

Mary's reign redefined the contours of the English monarchy. She made it possible for queens to rule as kings, and established the gender-free authority of the crown. ■

Anna Whitelock is a reader in early modern history at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is the author of *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* (Bloomsbury, 2009)

# THE BLOODY QUEEN

In a feature originally published in *BBC History Magazine* in 2006, **David Loades** reassessed the reign of 'Bloody Mary' and asked whether she fully deserves history's opprobrium

 On 21 March 1556, a wet and miserable Wednesday morning, the 66-year-old former archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, was burned alive in the town ditch of Oxford in front of Trinity College, in what is now Broad Street.

The event was dramatic in every sense of the word, presided over by the mayor and attended by the kind of expectant crowd normal at public executions. Cranmer had been expected to recant, and particularly to retract his rejection of the physical presence of Christ in the eucharist (transubstantiation); indeed, he had already signed several documents to that effect. However, when he was paraded in St Mary's Church (near All Souls College in the High Street) immediately prior to his

execution to confirm his submission, he sensationally repudiated all such actions, reaffirming the Protestant faith by which he had lived for at least ten years.

His confessors were distraught, the magistrates outraged, and some of the spectators no doubt (secretly) exultant. What had looked like being a piece of rather sordid political theatre was suddenly transformed into a glorious martyrdom. In a final dramatic gesture, the old man insisted on first consigning to the flames the hand that had signed his recantations.

Cranmer had been archbishop of Canterbury since 1533, guiding Henry VIII through the rejection of papacy and the adoption of the English Bible. At the beginning of Mary I's reign he had explicitly rejected the re-adoption of the mass. By the law he should not have died because, having been judicially convicted

of heresy only once, in 1555, he had recanted. However, both Cardinal Pole and, particularly, the queen were determined to see him dead.

Pole was the son of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, daughter of George, Duke of Clarence, and consequently the great-nephew of King Edward IV (1461–83). He had fallen out bitterly with Henry VIII over the latter king's divorce and had written polemic against him; when created cardinal in 1536, Pole moved out of Henry's reach but his family was destroyed by the vengeful monarch, who had every reason to be bitter towards the reformers.

## Death of a martyr

Mary had reprieved Cranmer from the traitor's death to which he had been condemned in 1553 for endorsing Jane Grey's claim to the throne, because she





Portrait of Queen Mary  
1654. Her reign was  
short but significant

## Mary I / The bloody queen

believed his crimes against God to be more significant than his crimes against the state. His recantations, honestly obtained by his sister and unsuspecting Spanish friars, were a serious embarrassment and, when one appeared in print, it was suppressed. "Of her purpose to burn him" as John Foxe sardonically observed, "she would in no wise relent." We are dependent upon Foxe, the author of *Acts and Monuments (Book of Martyrs)* for many details of the persecution. His work was published in 1563 as a defence of the Elizabethan settlement (the 1559 Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity that set out the basis for Protestant England).

When Cranmer was brought to St Mary's Church, therefore, he had nothing to lose and everything to gain by his gesture. By so doing, of course, he gave a retrospective pretext to his executioners. Three days after the event the Venetian ambassador reported to his government: "On Saturday last, the 21st March, Cranmer, late archbishop of Canterbury was burned, having fully verified the opinion formed of him by the queen, that he had feigned recantation thinking to save his life, and not that he had received any good inspiration, so she considered him unworthy of pardon..."

It was easy to say, and may well have been true, because Cranmer's death was an issue of conscience to Mary – and when her conscience was engaged she was implacable. She hated Cranmer because she held him personally responsible for her own humiliation and that of her mother, Catherine of Aragon, in 1533, as well as for the destruction of so much that she held dear in the teachings of the church. By Henry's repudiation of Catherine she had lost her status as queen, and Mary that of princess; she became merely "the Lady Mary, the king's daughter". The church had been stripped of its shrines, religious houses, and many saints days and traditional rites. She blamed Cranmer for what she regarded as the perversion of her innocent brother, Edward VI, known to his fellow Protestants as the 'Godly Imp', but to her a needlessly lost soul.

More generally, her hatred of heresy was paranoid but idiosyncratic. She must have known of the deliberations of the pope's Council of Trent, because several of the Spanish theologians who accompanied her husband, Prince Philip of Spain, to England in 1554, and were present in her court, had participated in it, but she seems to have paid little heed to them. The Council had sat for two sessions (1545–7, 1551–2) and made decrees on justification and vernacular scripture. These would not be promulgated until after the third session (1563), but Philip's theologians knew all about them.

### The queen's cold fury

Three issues particularly engaged her: the mass (or sacrament of the altar); the marriage of priests; and the authority of the pope. On the last of these she was trying to redeem a guilty conscience, having surrendered her convictions under pressure from her father in 1536. Clerical celibacy was something of an obsession with her, and a modern observer can see more than a casual link to her own repressed sexuality, but the denial of transubstantiation – common ground to all Protestants – aroused in her a cold fury that even her bishops found hard to understand.

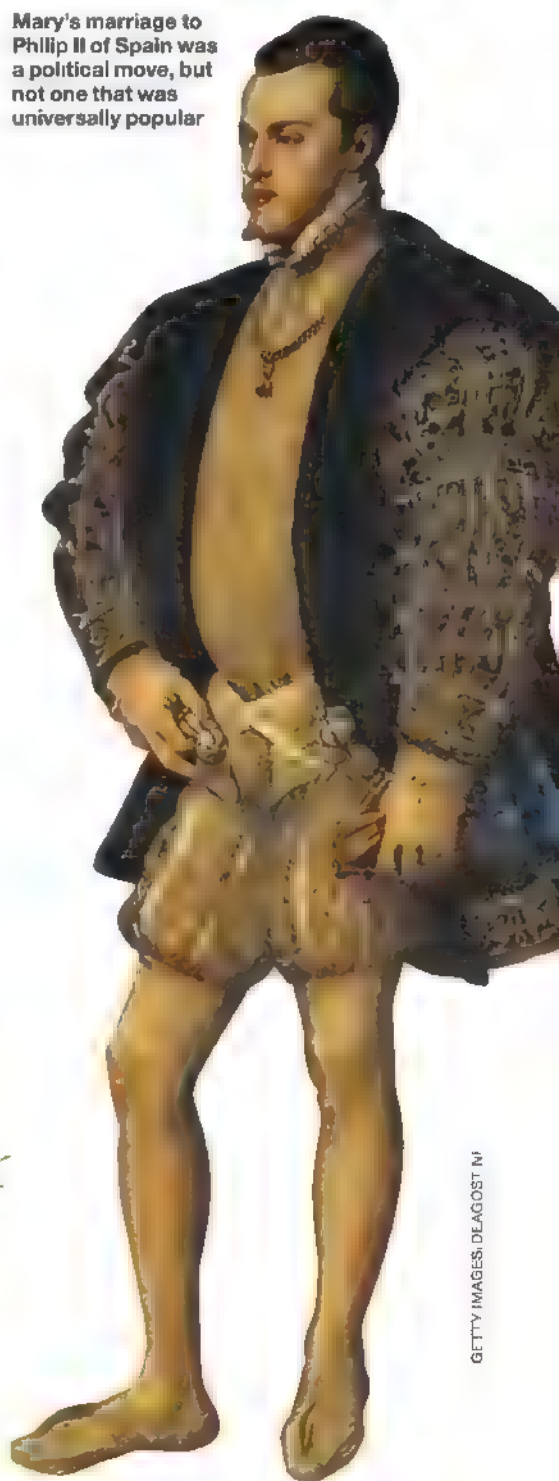
There can be little doubt that it was the queen herself who drove the notorious persecution. Cardinal Pole, who had a much more subtle and sophisticated mind, supported her in principle and used his own Legatine authority for that purpose, but was often uneasy over the scale and relentless purpose of the executions, many of the victims seeming to him more ignorant and misled than culpable. Her bishops, too, were often reluctant, even Foxe's main villains, Stephen Gardiner and Edmund Bonner. The former was the original inspirer of terror, but wished to draw back when it manifestly was not working. The latter, as bishop of London, was unavoidably in the front line and was held to his task by the council. Other bishops, even the most zealous Catholics, took endless pains to secure recantations,

and proceeded to extremes only when given no option.

Apart from the queen, the most zealous persecutors tended to be among the lay magistrates and second rank ecclesiastical officials such as deans and archdeacons. It was an attitude that sprang sometimes from conviction, sometimes from personal motives, and should cause no surprise to anyone who is aware of the strength of contemporary religious passions.

In many respects, Mary's church does not deserve its sanguinary reputation. Its bishops, particularly those installed by Mary, showed proper concern for the pastoral care of their flocks, issued manuals

**Mary's marriage to Philip II of Spain was a political move, but not one that was universally popular**



"Cranmer's death was an **issue of conscience** to Mary – and when her conscience was engaged **she was implacable**. She hated Cranmer"



of spiritual guidance, and preached with a diligence that their most zealous opponents could scarcely emulate.

Both Pole and the queen made extraordinary efforts to renovate the material infrastructure so severely damaged by Henry VIII and his successor Edward VI, concentrating on universities, cathedrals and churches. Not only had religious houses and most collegiate churches been dissolved and their property confiscated, but many sees had been damaged by unequal (and enforced) exchanges of lands. Some religious houses were re-founded, and some new perpetual chantries established, but these were not high on Mary's list of priorities. A purified clergy and the elimination of heresy were her main objectives.

### An enlightened church

So it came about that a church that was in many respects both pastorally and theologically enlightened, and which was surprisingly willing to learn from the successes of its opponents, nevertheless conducted one of the most ferocious and concentrated persecutions of the whole Reformation period. More people died at the stake and in prison in England between February 1555 and November 1558 than suffered at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition and the French *chambre ardente* (the French King Henri II's attempt to hunt out "heresy") together over the same period.

This paradox is partly explained by the role of the queen. Without Mary there would have been no Catholic restoration, and much of what she set out to do was popular with her subjects, who preferred the old ways and ceremonies to newfangled German or Swiss innovations. But they did not share her enthusiasm for the pope, or her Spanish husband, and they did not hate heretics in the way that she did. So unpopular was the Spanish connection that Philip got much of the blame for the persecution, and eventually handed much valuable "patriotic" propaganda to the Protestants. It was therefore easier for her successor, Elizabeth, to be a Protestant patriot in 1558 than it would have been in 1553.

By no stretch of the imagination could Mary's reign be described as successful. She died childless after only five years, virtually abandoned by a husband who had many other preoccupations. The realm was afflicted with harvest failure, defeat in war and a devastating influenza epidemic. The war had been particularly unnecessary,

## THE LIFE OF MARY I

**18 February 1516**

Greenwich Palace, the couple's only child to survive infancy

**23 March 1534**

removes Mary's right to the throne

**7 January 1536**

**12 October 1537**

**July 1543**

her half-sister Elizabeth as Henry VIII's heirs, after Edward

**6 July 1553**

the throne, fearing a return to Catholicism, he also removed Elizabeth from the line of succession, despite her endorsement of the Church of England

**19 July 1553**

nine days after being proclaimed queen, Jane is deposed and her first acts as monarch is the imprisonment of those behind Jane's elevation

**January 1554**

executed on 12 February as a precaution against any future unrest

**18 March 1554**

Princess Elizabeth is sent to the Tower under suspicion of being involved in under house arrest at Woodstock Palace

**25 July 1554**

**March 1557**

**17 November 1558**

Having failed to produce an heir, Mary dies at Elizabeth will be her successor to the throne



and had resulted only in the loss of Calais – the last fragment of England's once extensive French dominions. Seen through John Foxe's coloured spectacles, this has amounted traditionally to an England cursed by God for its manifold sins.

### A political pioneer

Yet there was another side to the story. Mary was England's first ruling queen, a political pioneer who established the precedent that the gender of the monarch made no difference to the powers or prerogatives of the crown. She married, and at great personal cost, and in no little anguish and confusion of mind, retained her own and her realm's autonomy. Her ministers reorganised the financial structure, updated the administration of the navy and reformed the musters to make them more militarily effective.

Most importantly of all, perhaps, she preserved the Tudor succession, both positively and negatively. Her stand in 1553 was not only a personal triumph, it was

also a triumph for statutory legitimacy. She claimed the throne on Edward VI's death because in her own eyes she was Henry's only legitimate child, but her subjects accepted her because she was heir by the Act of Succession of 1543, which had reinstated both of Henry VIII's daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, as heirs in the event of their brother Edward predeceasing them. Similarly, when Mary died without heirs in 1558, she allowed that same Act to remain effective. She hated Elizabeth for many reasons, but refused to proceed against her arbitrarily or by force, allowing her to succeed by due course of law in spite of privately regarding her as a bastard and a heretic.

Moreover, in spite of her conviction that parliament did not have, and never had had, any right to intervene in the affairs of the church, she accepted the advice that she must proceed by repealing the offending statutes rather than ignoring them. These statutes went back to 1533, and included the enactment of the royal supremacy and

the first and second Edwardian Acts of Uniformity. The logic of Mary's attitude to the papacy (and Reginald Pole's advice) required her to ignore them, but she did not do so, and thus unintentionally confirmed the right of parliament to legislate on such matters. Her church, like its predecessor, was "by law established".

Parliament repealed Edward's acts without much difficulty, but struck a hard bargain over the repeal of Henry's. This was over retention of former church lands, with which Pole and Mary were unhappy but accepted under pressure from Philip and her own council. The authority of statute was strengthened by these moves by Mary, although that was not her intention. When Elizabeth came to make a new religious settlement in 1559, even its opponents could not deny that parliament was the proper forum.

Mary was intelligent and extremely hard-working, but she was restricted by her conscience, her personality and her lack of relevant experience. She had spent most of



her adult life fighting the policies of her predecessors, and yet was constrained to accept the service and advice of many nobles and officials who had been deeply involved in them. As a result she did not trust many of her own council, preferring the advice of those who had served her as princess, such as Robert Rochester, or outsiders including Simon Renard, the imperial ambassador. In seeking guidance on her marriage she turned to her old protector, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who was her cousin and to whom she had in 1521–26 been engaged as part of a political alliance; as a result she married his son (who later ruled Spain as Philip II of Spain), a match that suited his agenda much better than hers.

Although there were valid reasons to support it, her marriage was a mistake – or, rather, a gamble that did not come off. Had she given birth to a healthy child, the whole subsequent history of England might have been different – but she did not, and by 1556 Philip was losing interest in her and her kingdom. Mary was incapable of playing the coquette, and regarded her sex as a crippling disability. She was consequently torn between the desire to be a dutiful wife and the need to be an independent sovereign. She followed Philip into a deeply unpopular war with France, but refused him both a coronation and an

English patrimony. He was constrained to pay his English bills out of his Spanish revenues – a situation that his advisers resented bitterly. Most important of all, Mary did not know how to manage men, least of all her husband, and too many of those who enjoyed her favour were men of second-rate ability.

### A queen cursed of God

Religious orthodoxy was more important to her than ability, and her ablest councillor, William Lord Paget, was kept in office only by pressure from Philip. Paget had been Henry VIII's secretary, and had been closely involved in the Protestant reforms of Edward VI's reign. Mary had welcomed him onto her council, and he had played a leading part in negotiating her marriage, but she had lost confidence in him in 1554 when he quarrelled with the lord chancellor over religious policy. After Philip's arrival in July 1554 Paget was very much "the king's man". Mary was in many respects a tragic figure, called by birth to an office for which she was temperamentally unsuited, and she died, worn out, at the age of 43.

John Foxe, whose *Acts and Monuments* (known as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*) contains one of the most complete contemporary histories of the reign, hated Mary and all that she stood for. But Foxe was also a staunch upholder of the royal supremacy of the English crown over the church, and refused to blame Mary for the persecution of Protestants. To him, the guilty parties were the Roman clergy, particularly the bishops. Mary herself was, if anything, a victim, led astray by a pernicious clerical conspiracy, that not only aimed to eliminate true religion but also to bring England under a Spanish and papal tyranny. In his eyes she made two

tragic errors that vitiated all her good qualities: she married Philip and she brought back the pope, the latter following inevitably from the former. Foxe never called her 'bloody Mary' – that was a later invention – but he did portray her as cursed of God, who afflicted her kingdom, left her childless and cut short her days. His judgement has proved remarkably durable, but the time has come to move on. In many ways Mary left a very positive legacy – but one that Foxe was too preoccupied to see.

Parliament, the revenues, the navy, even the church benefited from her policies. But the big beneficiary was also the least grateful – Elizabeth. Without her sister's enlightened legislation and sound administration Elizabeth would have had a much harder time. Without the religious persecution, she might have found it more difficult to persuade her realm to accept a Protestant religious settlement. Elizabeth, for good reason, refused to allow her servants to represent the reign of Mary as illegitimate, but she did encourage them to destroy her reputation, and for that purpose John Foxe was invaluable. ■

David Loades was professor of history at Bangor. His books included *Mary Tudor: The Tragical History of the First Queen of England* (National Archives, 2006). He died in April 2016

"Mary was incapable of playing the coquette, and regarded her sex as a crippling disability"

Mary juggled her duties as a wife with those of running a country. The queen desperately wanted an heir, but was forced to admit that the crown would go to her sister when she died



1558-1603

# ELIZABETH I

## THE GREAT UNIFIER

The Kitchener portrait of Elizabeth I, c1550 — one of many contemporary paintings to cultivate the image of the queen as "alone, majestic, expressionless, and imperial"

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN





# BETWEEN

**Susan Doran** examines the life of a queen who, beset by enemies, nonetheless united her country as a Protestant martial power

Elizabeth I faced more difficulties as a monarch than any other Tudor. Her right to rule as queen of England never went unchallenged. Protestants (notably John Knox) initially claimed that female rule was unnatural or monstrous, while Roman Catholics judged Elizabeth a bastard since they refused to recognise her father's marriage to her mother. Unlike her father and brother, whose legitimacy was never questioned, Elizabeth had to confront dynastic challenges at her accession that continued almost until her death.

Another difficulty for Elizabeth was that she inherited a realm ill at ease with itself. Religious persecution under her sister, Mary, had divided communities and traumatised English Protestants and their sympathisers. The economic recession, dreadful harvests and devastating epidemics of the mid-1550s created uncertainties and shattered the lives of many ordinary people. The humiliating French capture of Calais (England's last continental possession) in January 1558 punctured confidence in England's military power and international prestige.

From these problems Elizabeth emerged triumphant. She confounded her Catholic enemies, imposed her will on the political scene, turned England into a strong Protestant state and presided over a glittering court culture. Her unusual situation as an unmarried queen – the only one in British history – created a mystique around her that has survived to this day.

### **Flexible and moderate**

Elizabeth's dominant place in British history is above all assured by the establishment and defence of the 1559 Protestant settlement – the English Prayer Book and Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion – which remains the basis of the Church of England today. Due to her determination the Church of

England remained sufficiently flexible and moderate. Elizabethan parishioners, for example, could take communion standing, sitting or kneeling, depending on the preferences of the community and its minister. Elizabeth would have no truck with those zealous Protestants who attempted to introduce the more austere discipline of Calvinist Geneva into England. In consequence, notwithstanding the strength of Catholic opinion at the outset of her reign, the Protestant form of worship imposed by her Act of Uniformity gained in popularity over time and became embedded in English lay culture.

Protestantism in England also survived because Elizabeth was successful in seeing off the Catholic threat. At home she prevented or suppressed Catholic rebellion, conspiracy and disobedience without descending into tyranny or intense religious persecution. It is, of course, true that she signed the death warrant of Mary Queen of Scots, but her reluctance to do so is legendary. It's also true that Jesuits, seminary priests and their harbourers were imprisoned or executed under Elizabeth, but these prosecutions mainly occurred in the 1580s when Spain and the pope were thought to be using Catholic priests to destabilise the realm. By the standards of the age – and compared with her father and siblings – Elizabeth was a model of religious tolerance. Thanks to her, English history was not scarred by massacres and the country did not descend into civil war.

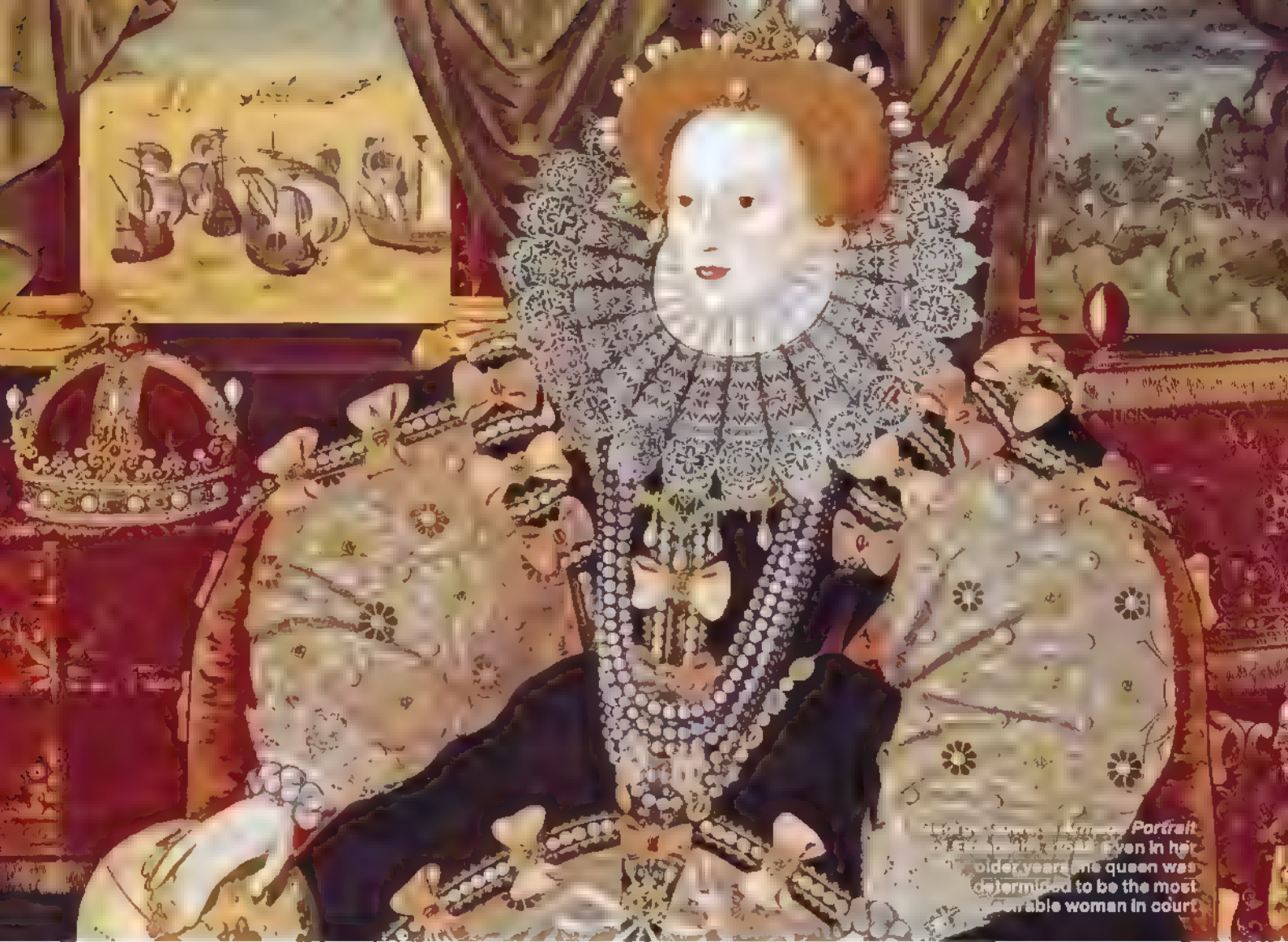
Elizabeth's importance in British history is also a result of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Memorialised in later paintings and film, the English victory of 1588 saved England from Spanish rule and preserved the Protestant church. Furthermore, as the most notable military success since the battle of Agincourt, it restored confidence in England's martial reputation and pointed to the future when England would become a major naval power. Henry VIII may be generally viewed as the founder of

the English navy, but his navy was for show whereas Elizabeth's was for use. Elizabeth's sailors and ships were also employed in voyages of exploration, beginning the process that would lead to the establishment of the British empire.

Of course, Elizabeth's fame also rests on her virginity. Admittedly, during her reign the fact that she remained single was a source of political anxiety as well as strength. However, it had two important positive results. The first was that her heir was James VI, who united in his person Scotland and England – a crucially important event in the development of British history. The second was that it transformed the queen into a cultural icon. Her portraits of the 1580s and 1590s depict the archetypal Elizabeth: alone, majestic, expressionless and imperial, her virginity on show through a variety of symbols – pearls, cherries, a sieve, a crescent moon, an ermine.

This 'Virgin Queen' is not only immediately recognisable – it an image that made Elizabeth a source of fascination for centuries. Biographers and psychologists have felt the need to investigate how she could dismiss social and political norms and refuse marriage. The prurient want to know if her courtiers – Leicester, Essex and Hatton – were her lovers. Early (mainly male) biographers and historians sought to explain how her rejection of love and motherhood affected her character. Feminists were attracted to the sight of a woman defying conventions and ruling alone. Everyone wants to know how Elizabeth could rule successfully in a man's world without a husband. Mary may have marked out a new path, but Elizabeth broke entirely new ground as an unmarried queen. ■

Susan Doran is professor of early modern history at Jesus College, Oxford. Her latest book is *Elizabeth I and Her Circle* (Oxford University Press, 2015)



Portrait of Elizabeth I. Even in her older years, the queen was determined to be the most formidable woman in court.

# From **virgin** queen to **vindictive** monarch

Elizabeth I was a powerful, determined woman – and a jealous mistress to her ladies-in-waiting. **Tracy Borman** reveals the dark side of Good Queen Bess



**B**y the late 1570s Lettice Knollys, the beguiling cousin of Elizabeth I, had long enjoyed a position of influence in society. A member of the queen's closest entourage, she had attracted the attention of many high ranking male courtiers – among them her cousin's chief favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

The pair had been carrying on a flirtation for a number of years, and in late 1578 rumours began to circulate around the court that they had married in secret. It was the scandal of the decade. The queen had made it clear that she would not tolerate her ladies marrying without her permission, and now her cousin had stolen away the man whom many still believed Elizabeth would one day marry herself.

Leicester had many enemies at court who, jealous of his closeness to the queen, were happy to reveal the scandal to her. The result was explosive. Incandescent with rage, the queen cried that she would send Leicester to "rot in the Tower". When an unsuspecting Lettice next appeared at court, her royal mistress lashed out at her, boxing her ears and screaming that "as but one sun lightened the earth, she would have but one queen in England". Lettice was promptly banished from court and Elizabeth referred to her as "that she-wolf" forever afterwards.

Just as Elizabeth was 'married' to her country, so she expected her ladies to be 'married' to her service. She would regularly lecture the maids of honour and other unmarried ladies of her household on marriage and would "much exhort all her women to remain in virgin state". The fact that she was known to so fiercely disapprove of their marrying created a vicious circle in which her ladies were often too afraid to seek her permission but instead married in secret, which in turn provoked even greater wrath when their secret was discovered. This, more than any other occurrence at court, brought out the queen's vindictive side with increasing severity as the reign progressed.

Although Elizabeth's ladies were often a source of irritation to their royal mistress, they were an indispensable part of her court. As well as undertaking practical duties, they created a backdrop against which the queen could be displayed to maximum effect. Everywhere that Elizabeth went, she was flanked by an entourage of ladies who served to enhance her magnificence.

Immaculately dressed in the fashions dictated by Elizabeth, these ladies formed a decorative presence: pleasing to the eye – but not too pleasing. It was imperative that no woman should outshine the queen; rather, they should emphasise her peerless beauty and brilliance. Thus, while Elizabeth appeared at court bedecked in lavish gowns of rich materials and vivid colours, her ladies wore only black or white. To test the effect that this created, the queen once asked a visiting French nobleman what he thought of her ladies. He immediately protested that he was unable to "judge stars in the presence of the sun". This was exactly the response that Elizabeth required and it neatly defined the role that she had created for the women at her court.

Elizabeth would brook no rival for the attentions of her male courtiers. She delighted in being at the centre of a game of courtly love that she herself had created. Although lauded as the Virgin Queen, she was a most notorious flirt. "The queene did fishe for men's souls, and had so sweete a baite, that no one coude escape hir network," observed one of her favourites, Sir Christopher Hatton.

But if Elizabeth assumed that her male admirers would be so dazzled by her presence as to remain oblivious to her ladies, she gravely miscalculated. The fact that so many young men and women were crowded together in the closeted world of the court created an atmosphere charged with sexual tension. Countless flirtations, courtships and marriages were conducted behind the queen's back. The need for secrecy no doubt added a certain frisson to these courtships, as lovers snatched furtive encounters in the

many private alcoves and chambers of the royal palaces.

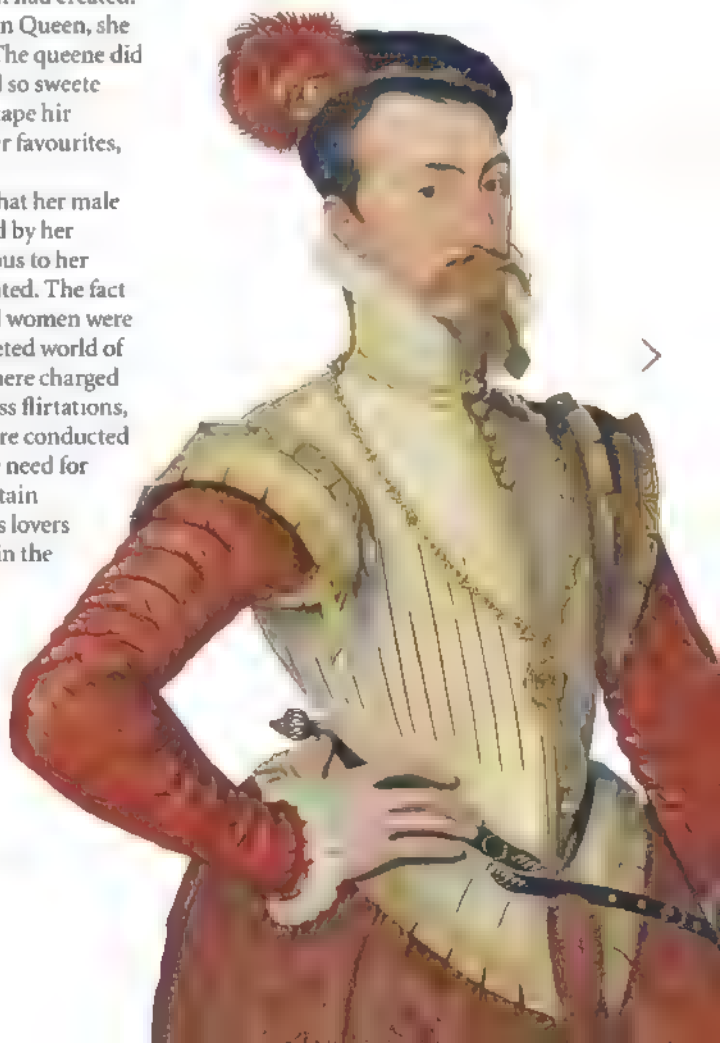
Such scandals became ever more prevalent in the later years of Elizabeth's reign. As the queen grew into old age, she became increasingly intolerant of the new generation of ladies-in-waiting and often "swore out [against] such ungracious, flouting wenches", making them "cry and bewail in piteous sort". It seemed that almost every year there were scandals involving clandestine seduction and unwanted pregnancies. By the late 1590s this had become so prevalent that one courtier noted: "Maides of the court goe scarce 20 wekis with child after they are marryed."

One of the most notorious scandals of the 1590s involved Elizabeth ('Bess') Throckmorton. Intelligent, witty, passionate and forthright, Bess was by all accounts something of a beauty. She had an exquisite sense of style and embellished the black and white gowns that she and her companions were obliged to wear with as many jewels as she could get away with under the queen's jealous scrutiny.

Among Bess's many admirers was Sir Walter Raleigh, the man who had succeeded Leicester as the queen's great favourite. Their affair began in around 1590, and by July of the following year

## "Lettice was banished from court and referred to as 'that she-wolf' forever after"

The queen was furious to discover that Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester – and one of her closest friends – had married her second cousin in secret



### THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH I

**17 November 1558**

After a five-year reign **Mary I dies** and, without an heir, leaves the throne to Elizabeth. Despite a turbulent relationship, Mary had accepted that her half-sister would become queen.

**29 April 1559**

The **Act of Uniformity** is passed by parliament, making Protestantism the country's official faith. The original *Book of Common Prayer* becomes the only legal form of worship.

**19 August 1561**

**Mary Stuart returns to Scotland** after the death of her husband, Francis II of France. Elizabeth regards this devout Catholic with suspicion.

**16 May 1568**

Elizabeth senses a coup from the Catholics. She supports the Scottish Protestants and swiftly defeats Mary's army. **Mary is imprisoned** for 19 years.

**10 August 1585**

**Elizabeth sends troops** to aid Dutch Protestants fighting the King of Spain.

**8 February 1587**

**Mary, Queen of Scots is beheaded** after Sir Francis Walsingham proves her involvement in the Babington Conspiracy the previous year.

**8 August 1588**

Led by Sir Francis Drake, **the English navy defeats the Spanish Armada** at the battle of Gravelines. The following day, Elizabeth gives her famous rallying speech at Tilbury. "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king – and a king of England, too".

**31 December 1600**

Elizabeth I gives the East India Company a royal charter. The company later becomes **a major force in British imperial expansion**.

**24 March 1603**

**Elizabeth dies** at Richmond Palace after a 44-year reign. The Tudor era ends as James VI of Scotland takes the throne.

Bess was pregnant. In panic, she fled to her lover and begged him to marry her. No doubt aghast at the prospect of their secret being discovered, Sir Walter nevertheless did the honourable thing and made Bess his wife.

#### Thrown in the Tower

Thereafter, Bess continued with her duties in the Privy Chamber, hiding her swelling stomach as best she could. Only at the end of February 1592, by which time she was more than eight months pregnant, did she finally secure her royal mistress's permission to take a leave of absence. Her secret broke soon after she had given birth to a son. When the queen found out, she was furious at having been so duped and ordered Bess and her husband to be thrown into the Tower. Although Elizabeth soon forgave Raleigh, Bess was left languishing in the Tower for several months, during which time she learned that her baby son – perhaps pining for his mother's care – had died. Elizabeth showed no sympathy and instead ordered that Bess should continue a prisoner.

Bess Throckmorton's betrayal was one of many to occur in the queen's household during the later years of her reign. Anne Vavasour, a gentlewoman of the bedchamber, fell pregnant by the Earl of Oxford and actually gave birth in the maidens' chamber. Her baby's cries gave the game away, and when news of it reached the queen she ordered that Mistress Vavasour be conveyed at once to the Tower even though she was still recovering from the birth. A later controversy involved Mary Fitton, a maid of honour whom some believe was the 'dark lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets. She would steal out of her apartments at night disguised as a man in order to meet her lover, William Herbert, eldest son of the Earl of Pembroke. Her misdemeanour was discovered when she was "proved with child" and she was banished from court.

Having endured so many scandals, Elizabeth became deeply embittered against any of her ladies who dared to have affairs or marry in secret – especially as she herself had put duty ahead of personal desires. Her punishments, even for minor misdemeanours, became ever more severe as she desperately tried to regain control of her household. Leicester's illegitimate son, Robert Dudley, was exiled from court in 1591 for merely kissing Mistress Cavendish, a lady of the household. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Bridges and Elizabeth Russell received a beating from their royal mistress for stealing a glimpse of the Earl of Essex as he played sports.



The queen's increasing bitterness against the women who served her was at least partly due to the fact that their youthful beauty was a painful reminder of her own rapidly deteriorating looks. Desperate to maintain her role as the most desirable woman at court, Elizabeth took to wearing ever more elaborate clothes and jewels. She had originally chosen wigs that matched her own colouring but as she grew older these were used to conceal her greying hair. At the same time, ever more layers of makeup were applied to complete the so-called 'mask of youth'. Only her closest ladies were allowed to see what lay beneath.

Despite all her efforts, the onset of old age was becoming increasingly obvious to everyone at court. Lorenzo Priuli, the Venetian ambassador in France, brutally described Elizabeth as being of an "advanced age and repulsive physical nature". As she tried to stop the mask of youth from slipping, Elizabeth appeared as a grotesque parody of her former self. Reporting on his visit to court in 1597, Monsieur de Maisse sniggered that she was "strangely attired" in an elaborately decorated dress that was so low cut that "one could see the whole of her bosom", which he added was "somewhat wrinkled".

The fading of Elizabeth's looks was symptomatic of her loosening grip on the affairs of the court, and the formerly strict moral standards began to decay rapidly. As new generations of young ladies joined her household, they were frustrated by what they perceived to be the queen's old-fashioned attitudes and were unwilling to make the sacrifices of their predecessors in order to serve her faithfully.





Robert Peake's c1601 oil on canvas shows Elizabeth being carried by her courtiers with her ladies following behind

The loss of her old friend Catherine Howard, Countess of Nottingham, in February 1603 plunged Elizabeth into a 'settled and unremovable melancholy' from which she never recovered.

Elizabeth died in her bed in March 1603 at the age of 69, surrounded not by the young ladies who had caused her such grief towards the end of her life but by a small group of women, including Lady Warwick and the Marchioness of Northampton, who had served her faithfully for many years. That Elizabeth had found friends as well as "flouting wenches" among her household proves that there was a good deal more to her relationships with women than the rather distorted picture of her later reign suggests. In fact, far from being a 'man's woman', as she is so often portrayed, she had been profoundly influenced by the women who had surrounded her throughout her life.

These ranged from her bewitching mother, Anne Boleyn, to her dangerously obsessive sister, Mary Tudor, and from rivals to her throne (the Grey sisters and Mary, Queen of Scots) to her closest friends at court, such as Kat Astley and Helena Snakenborg. These were the women who shaped her, and it is through their eyes that the real Elizabeth, stripped of her carefully cultivated image, is revealed. **11**

Tracy Borman is an author and historian. Her latest book is *The Private Lives of the Tudors* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2016)

### Short and ill becoming

Lady Mary Howard was typical of this new breed of courtier. Tired of the strictures that Elizabeth had imposed with regard to her ladies' dress, Lady Mary one day appeared at court in an ostentatious gown made from a rich velvet and "powdered with golde and pearle". Elizabeth was so jealous that a few days later she ordered a servant to steal the gown from Lady Mary's chamber and bring it to her. She duly put it on herself and paraded it in front of her ladies. Addressing Lady Howard, she

demanded to know how the dress suited her, to which the resentful reply came that it was "too short and ill becoming". "Why then", Elizabeth purred, "if it become not me, as being too shorte, I am minded it shall never become thee, as being too fine; so it fitteth neither well."

By the beginning of the 17th century, Elizabeth's courtiers paid no more than lip service to this once glorious queen. Increasingly, they looked north of the border to her likely successor. Her circle of faithful attendants was also diminishing.

## THE COURTLY PLAYERS

### Lettice Knollys

The granddaughter of Mary Boleyn, Lettice Knollys was a second cousin to the queen. Kinship did little to endear her to Elizabeth, who resented this attractive and arrogant figure. When the treachery of Lettice's secret marriage to Robert Dudley was discovered, it set the seal on the two women's antipathy.

### Bess Throckmorton

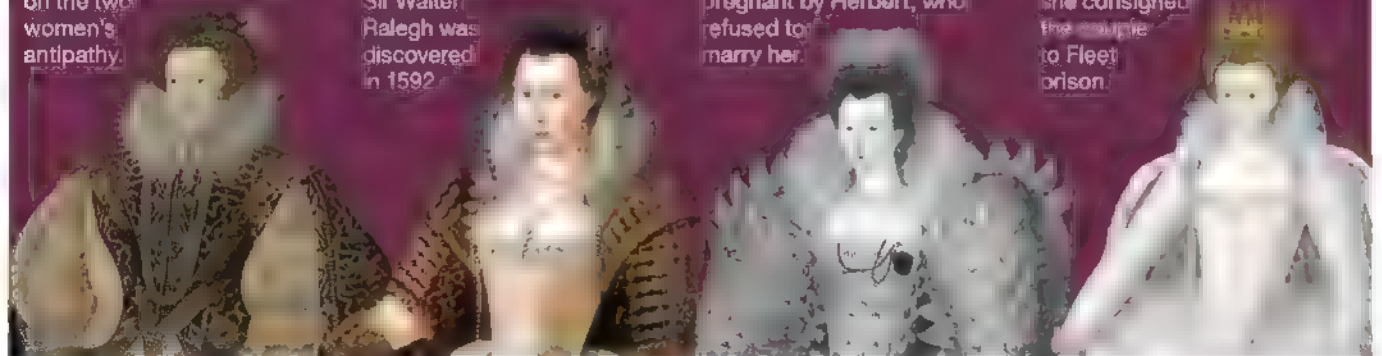
Bess had entered the queen's service in 1584 as a gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber. The Throckmorton family had long been connected to the court, and Bess initially became one of Elizabeth's closest female attendants. This intimacy was shattered when her secret marriage to Sir Walter Raleigh was discovered in 1592.

### Mary Fitton

Miss Fitton's guardian, the aged Sir William Knollys, fell hopelessly in love with her and she encouraged his advances while secretly courting William Herbert, eldest son of the Earl of Pembroke. She was banished from court when it was discovered that she was pregnant by Herbert, who refused to marry her.

### Elizabeth Vernon

Elizabeth Vernon caused a scandal at court when she fell pregnant by the notorious rake Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. His friend (and Miss Vernon's cousin) the Earl of Essex forced him to marry her. When the queen found out, she consigned the couple to Fleet prison.





This 16th-century painting shows revellers at a festival in Bermondsey.

# SENSES WORKING OVERTIME

The Elizabethans inhabited a sensory world that was considerably different to our own. **Ian Mortimer** takes us back in time...

**T**raditionally, the past is something we look at from afar. The very act of 'doing history' is one of reaching for something that has gone and is therefore, by definition, out of reach. So it is hardly surprising that we approach its remains objectively, picking over them with a pair of metaphorical tweezers.

But what would we feel if the past were not out of reach? Imagine how your ideas about the past would be different if you could get close up and personal with your forebears. What would you notice if you

could see through their eyes, hear with their ears, and smell through their nostrils? What were the tastes and feelings of the past? Can we make any headway in trying to recover them?

Adopting this approach is a particularly interesting exercise when it comes to Elizabethan England – much more revealing than simply looking at ourselves in a 450-year-old mirror. Not only do we see the similarities, we see the differences, too: the cruelty of a society that enthusiastically supports bawdy games, regularly sentences people to horrific executions, and approves of torture in the interests of the state. We see the

extraordinary hierarchy, violence and misogyny of society, and how young people are (half are under 22).

And then, as we peel away the layers of tradition that make us feel that we are fundamentally the same as Shakespeare's contemporaries, we realise how they inhabit a sensory world that is considerably different from our own. Few people can come to terms with humanity in another age and not see themselves in a new – and sometimes quite disturbing – light.

Ian Mortimer is the author of *The Time Traveller's Guide to Elizabethan England* (The Bodley Head, 2012) and writes fiction as James Forrester



# SEEING

## *Darkness reigns in a world in which only the rich can afford glass*

For six months of every year there is less than 12 hours of daylight, and street lighting is almost unheard of in Elizabethan England; so time out of doors in autumn and winter is characterised by darkness.

But dimness is always an aspect of seeing indoors, even in summer. Domestic glass is rare, due to the paucity of glassmakers in 16th-century England. Although the aristocracy used glass since the late Middle Ages, and the Countess of Shrewsbury famously has "more glass than wall" at Hardwick Hall, most houses have to have small windows to prevent massive heat loss in winter.

Wooden shutters or small opaque screens of horn are used to cover the windows, so there is never much light inside. In winter you will walk around a farmhouse or cottage in near-darkness.

Candles are expensive and, if unprotected by a lantern casing, they constitute a serious fire hazard, so most people make do with just one or two, and carry them between rooms. If they cannot afford wax candles people use tallow candles and rushlights instead – or make do with just the light of the hearth.

When you do have light, you will notice that Elizabethans see colour differently from you, due to the restricted range of dyes in nature. The only natural red in England is madder (taken from the plant of that name); most women have their petticoats dyed this colour. If you want a brighter red you will need to obtain it from abroad.

Scarlet is made from kermes, a parasitic larva from the Mediterranean. Cochineal is hardly known in England, being made from an insect in Latin America, and brazilwood has to be imported from the Middle East or the New World. These sources are not

easily available to English merchants, being under the control of Catholic states.

As for purple, very few Elizabethans will have ever seen it. The nearest they will have seen is a sort of violet made from madder and the only natural blue dye commonly available in England, woad. If you were to appear in a purple shirt, you would leave Elizabethans reeling

**An illustration of the house in which William Shakespeare was born. Windows were small to keep in the heat during winter**



# HEARING

## *Bells and bagpipes shatter the silence in the villages*

In modern times there have been various brave attempts to recreate the 'authentic' sounds of the past by playing the music on instruments constructed to contemporary designs. As you will soon realise from experiencing sensations in Elizabethan England, even if you can recreate the authentic sound you cannot recreate the experience of hearing that sound, because listening to music takes place in a different context in Elizabethan times.

There is no backdrop of motor, train and air traffic, there are no blaring sirens, no background of recorded music or radio, and no hum of electrical appliances. In fact there are very few loud noises. There is thunder; occasionally there is the report of a gun or cannon; and certain instruments such as large bells, trumpets and shawms can create a striking impression, as can the

galloping of many horses together. But all these things are occasional or only heard in specific situations. The general range of aural experience is therefore much narrower and more sensitive to sounds, which are normally heard in isolation.

Elizabethans notice when a church bell rings the hour – they sometimes refer to a time as 'ten of the bell', rather than 'ten of the clock' – because they are used to listening out for the time. People also listen to music more intently because it stands out from their normal day-to-day silence.

A large number of people play an instrument of some sort. At the bottom end of society it is the bagpipes and fiddle that you will most often encounter. Walk into an alehouse in London at the end of the day and you will frequently be encouraged to dance by a smiling musician or two.

Most large towns employ their own small bands of musicians – called 'waits' – who regularly play in public. The wealthy employ their own bands to perform the airs and madrigals that are the most popular musical entertainment.

For most ordinary Elizabethans, however, it is a rare privilege to hear

a five-part air by Anthony Holborne, John Dowland or Thomas Morley, played on a selection of viols and violins, citterns, recorders, flutes and keyboard instruments (harpsichord, spinet and virginals). That is why they stand and gape while you, with your far greater aural experience, might consider the music quite ordinary.



**Elizabethans were far more sensitive to noise and loved music**

# SMELL

*The wealthy wash themselves daily; the masses go filthy*

Popular culture would have you believe that all Elizabethans are smelly (like everyone else living before Jane Austen, except the Romans). In reality, the personal and public olfactory landscape is far more complex.

At one end of the scale, if you are circumnavigating the world with Francis Drake in the years 1577–80, it is true that you will not bathe. Your hair and clothes will have lice and you will stink to high heaven, and so will everyone else on the ship (as will the ship itself). Your breath will reek. But in the context of the psychological pressures of such a voyage, including the awareness that most of the crew will die along the way, your shipmates' aroma is the least of your worries.

At the other end of the spectrum, wealthy people wash themselves daily by rubbing themselves in clean linen and washing their hands and faces in clean water. They immerse themselves occasionally in hot water carefully selected for its purity. They wash their hands before, after and during every meal. They wash their hair in lye, clean their teeth with tooth powder, and sweeten their breath with mouthwashes and liquorice.

In the presence of a refined lady you will not smell her body but the perfume she is wearing and the orris root with which her clothes were powdered while in storage.

Water availability is the key. If you live in a rented room on the fourth or fifth floor of an old timber-framed townhouse it will simply be too much effort to go to the public conduit to fetch enough water for a bath and to carry it up the stairs and then heat it up.

In any case, you probably won't be able to afford the firewood to heat the water if you are staying in such a tenement. Nor will you be able to afford fresh linen every day to rub yourself clean. So you will go filthy. Those of a comparable wealth to you will understand – they will smell, too, and know how much it costs to smell like a perfumed lady or gentleman.

Much the same can be said for sanitation. If you don't have a private water supply, you won't be able to build a water closet, even if you can afford to build a copy of Sir John Harington's flushing loo. Moreover, if you and 20 other family members and neighbours are sharing a single cesspit, it will need emptying regularly. The cost of removing a few tonnes of excrement, kitchen waste and menstrual cloths can be heavy – £2 4s in 1575, the equivalent of 132 days' work for a labourer. So the poor don't have their own cesspits but use common sewers and public latrines.

If you're too poor to eat, the last thing you want is the added cost of getting rid of detritus and faeces.



This illustration from 1582 shows women washing, drying and folding laundry near a stream. The availability of water was the key to cleanliness.

# TASTE

*Regardless of wealth, hunger turns everyone into a foodie*

It is said that there is no sauce quite like hunger. For this reason you may safely assume that poor Elizabethans enjoy their plain meals just as much as the rich enjoy their feasts and banquets. Food is not as scarce as in the late medieval and early Tudor periods, and nowhere near as scarce as it was in early medieval times but, nonetheless, you will be shocked at proportionately how expensive it is.

Consider the price of meat in relation to a worker's wage: on average an Elizabethan sheep costs 3s – nine times as much as a worker's daily wage in southern England – even though the largest sheep weigh about 60lbs (27kg), much less than half the weight of their modern descendants. You might like to ponder on that ratio: if meat had the same

value to us today, a small sheep would cost about £900 and a modern 180lb (81kg) animal about three times that.

Another way of gauging how special food is to Elizabethans is to reflect that in the famine of 1594–97, thousands died of starvation. When you can't take meat for granted, you're grateful for every one.

The diet eaten by the poor will probably not strike you as particularly exciting. For them, however, chicken boiled for an hour with garlic and cabbage is an absolute godsend. Although you may turn your nose up at over-boiled meat, it needs to be over-boiled when it is several days old. Both the water and the meat might poison you. This explains the tradition of boiling everything and serving it with butter. You may be surprised at how much butter is consumed by all classes.

Three days a week you are

not allowed to eat red meat (by law), so the wealthy eat an equally wide range of fish. Most of this is baked or stewed and served in sauces made with spices, mustard, salt, sugar and vinegar. Not everyone will like these strong flavours.

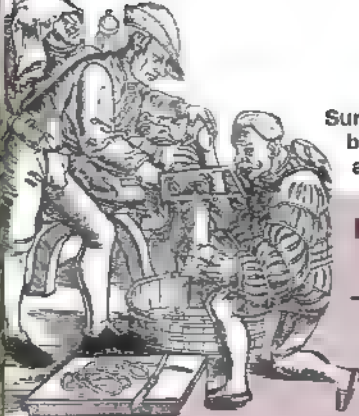
At a banquet (a selection of sweets following a feast), you might be startled to see marzipan sculptures dyed blue and green with azurite and spinach. And it might take you a little while to get used to sweetmeats that really are meat mixed with sugar and spices.

You'll even be able to tuck into mince pies made of mutton.



A woodcut from 1518 shows cooks preparing a meal. Food was extremely expensive in the 16th century.





Surgeons would saw through the bone to perform an amputation, as shown in this woodcut

## TOUCH

*Visiting a Tudor dentist could be a painful experience*

Elizabethan clothes vary hugely in texture, from very fine linen to coarse canvas. At the top end of society, the finest fabrics, such as silk, lawn and velvet, allow a much greater range of soft tactile sensations than are available to those at the bottom, who have to make do with canvas, buckram, worsted, serge, bays and linsey-wolsey.

The same can be said for bed linen and bedding. Fine holland sheets and two or three 'feather beds' (ie feather mattresses) on a slung bed with down-filled pillows are a luxury far beyond the reach of most labourers' families. They have to get by with straw mattresses on boards with canvas sheets and a wooden headrest.

There is also the perennial problem of how to keep warm, especially during an Elizabethan winter. Firewood is scarce and expensive, and coal used only for industrial work, so fires are not left burning in every room.

Many bed chambers have no fireplaces at all, and most windows are without glass. Even when shuttered, cold draughts get in and out. Gentlemen's

houses normally have just one or two fires burning through the day.

We feel pain in all ages, but in extreme situations we want to have some way of controlling it. Opiates are available to Elizabethan surgeons but they are expensive. If you have to have part of a limb removed, the operation will normally be done without any better painkiller than copious amounts of alcohol – wine if you can afford it, beer if you cannot.

Cutting the flesh is done with a sharp knife. After that, the surgeon saws through the bone – you have to hope he has cut through the nerve quickly to prevent it being shredded in the teeth of the saw.

As for toothache, you could go to a tooth-drawer. He will use an iron 'pelican' to solve the problem. This has a hook that goes under the tooth on the tongue side; the supporting side goes on the outside of the mouth. By means of a long handle he yanks the tooth out.

If that doesn't appeal, you could always ask for help from your local blacksmith, who will do the same thing with his pliers.

## FEAR

*Terror stalks an age of plague and paranoia*

These days in the UK people do not starve in their thousands. We do not have to live with the continual daily threat of plague, which kills approximately 250,000 Elizabethans, or influenza (the outbreak of 1557–59 kills about five per cent of England's population – more than twice the proportion killed by the First World War and the influenza pandemic of 1918–19 combined).

Most Elizabethan people who have children will see half of them die before they reach adulthood – if they themselves live long enough. Smallpox, malaria, tuberculosis and innumerable other diseases are rife and uncontrollable.

As if fear of death from disease were not enough, people live with fear of incrimination. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, hearing mass is a sufficient crime to

warrant a fine of £133, and not attending church for a month will lead to a period of imprisonment. People are watching you all the time. You have to be careful what you say and do in public – and even when among the servants in your own home.

This ever-present, deep-seated unease with your fellow men and women might trouble you just as much as the lack of food and the prospect of dying from a fatal disease. If they see someone of the opposite sex enter your house after dark, people might report you to the authorities on suspicion of committing adultery. Then

it is down to you to provide compurgators to prove your innocence. If you do not, you will lose your good reputation, be humiliated in front of the community, and may find yourself shunned thereafter.

People might report you simply out of envy or malice. This is especially the case with witchcraft: if someone's child dies and that person has a grudge against you, he or she might blame the death on your necromancy, especially if you are a woman. Such accusations can end up with you on the gallows, swinging with a rope round your neck. It does not matter that witchcraft is mere superstition;

people are still terrified of it – as they are terrified of death, invasion and harvest failure. What is more, the law is on their side. After 1563, witchcraft is officially recognised as a means of killing people.

All in all, the late 16th century might be a golden age of literature, exploration, scientific discovery and architecture, but when you consider the sensations that Elizabethan people experience every day, dark shadows appear in the golden glow. ■



Fear of incrimination was a large part of Tudor life. In this c1567 woodcut, a beggar is being whipped





The background of the page is a reproduction of a painting by Nicholas Hilliard, depicting the Battle of Gravelines in 1588. The painting shows a chaotic naval battle scene with several large sailing ships, including the Spanish Armada, engaged in combat. The ships are filled with soldiers, and there is a lot of smoke and fire from the cannons. The overall tone is dramatic and historical.

# ENGLAND'S lucky escape

It was bad tactics from the Spaniards that lost the battle in 1588 rather than a sterling performance from the English navy. **Robert Hutchinson** reveals how poorly prepared Tudor England was for the Spanish Armada

Nicholas Hilliard's interpretation of the battle of Gravelines, 1588. Tudor spin portrayed the escape of August 1588 as a glorious English victory. But, argues Robert Hutchinson, bad weather and bad tactics had more to do with the Spanish fleet's failure than Elizabethan derring-do



## Elizabeth I / Spanish Armada

**T**he failure of the Spanish Armada campaign of 1588 changed the course of European history. If the Duke of Parma's 27,000-strong invasion force had safely crossed the narrow seas from Flanders, the survival of Elizabeth I's government and Protestant England would have looked doubtful indeed.

If those battle-hardened Spanish troops had landed, as planned, near Margate on the Kent coast, it is likely that they would have been in the poorly defended streets of London within a week, and that the queen and her ministers would have been captured or killed. England would have reverted to the Catholic faith and there may have been no British empire.

It was bad luck, bad tactics and bad weather that defeated the Spanish Armada – not the derring-do displayed on the high seas by Elizabeth's intrepid sea dogs. But it was a near-run thing.

Because of Elizabeth's parsimony, driven by an embarrassingly empty exchequer, the English ships were starved of gunpowder and ammunition and so failed to land a killer blow on the 'Great and Most Fortunate Navy' during nine days of skirmishing up the English Channel in July and August 1588.

Only six Spanish ships out of the 129 that sailed against England were destroyed as a direct result of naval combat. However, a minimum of 50 Armada ships (probably as many as 64) were lost through accident or during the Atlantic storms that scattered the fleet en route to England and as it limped back to northern Spain.

More than 13,500 sailors and soldiers did not come home – the vast majority victims not of English cannon fire but of lack of food and water, virulent disease and incompetent organisation.

Thirty years before, when Philip II of Spain had been such an unenthusiastic husband to Mary I, he had observed: "The kingdom of England is and must always remain strong at sea, since upon this the safety of the realm depends."

Elizabeth knew this full well and gambled that her navy, reinforced by hired armed merchantmen and volunteer ships, could destroy the invasion force at sea. Her warships, she maintained, were the walls of her realm, and they became the first and arguably her last line of defence.

Decades of neglect had rendered most of England's land defences almost useless against an experienced and determined enemy. In March 1587, the counties along the English Channel had just six cannon each. A breach in the coastal fortifications at Bletchington Hill, Sussex, caused 43 years before in a French raid, was still unrepaired.

England had no standing army of fully armed and trained soldiers other than small garrisons in Berwick on the Scottish borders, and in Dover Castle on the Channel coast. Moreover, Elizabeth's nation was divided by religious dissent – almost half of her subjects were still Catholic, and her government was haunted by fears of them rebelling in support of Spain.

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was appointed to command Elizabeth's armies "in the south parts" to fight not only the invaders but any "rebels and traitors and other offenders and their adherents attempting anything against us, our crown and dignity..." and to "repress and subdue, slay or kill and put to death by all ways and means" any such insurgents "for the conservation of our person and peace".

Some among Elizabeth's subjects placed profit ahead of patriotism. In 1587, 12 English merchants – mostly from Bristol – were discovered supplying the Armada "to the hurt of her majesty and undoing of

the realm, if not redressed". Nine cargoes of contraband, valued between £300 and £2,000, contained not just provisions but also ammunition, gunpowder, muskets and ordnance. What happened to these traders (were they Catholics?) is unknown, but in those edgy times it's unlikely they enjoyed the queen's mercy.

Elsewhere, Sir John Gilbert, half-brother to Sir Walter Raleigh, refused permission for his ships to join Sir Francis Drake's western squadron and allowed them to sail on their planned voyage in March 1588 in defiance of naval orders.

If that wasn't bad enough, Elizabeth's military advisers – unaware that Parma planned to land on the Kent coast – decided on Essex as the most likely spot where the Spanish would storm ashore.

### Breaking barriers

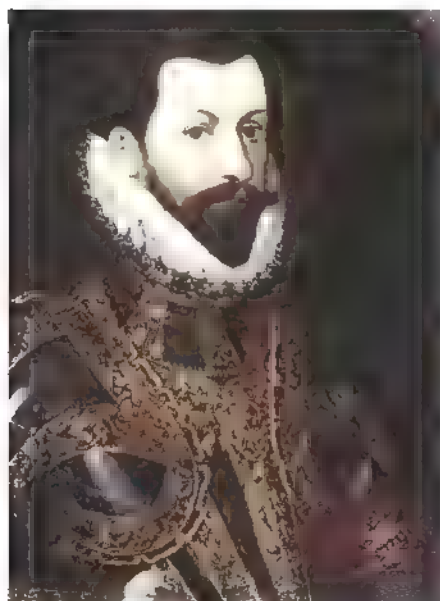
The Thames estuary had a wide channel leading straight to the heart of the capital, bordered by mud flats that posed a major obstacle to a vessel of any draught. Therefore, defensive plans included the installation of an iron chain across the river's fairway at Gravesend in Kent, designed by the Italian engineer Fedrigo Giambelli. This boom, supported by 120 ship's masts (costing £6 each) driven into the riverbed and attached to anchored lighters, was intended to stop enemy vessels penetrating upriver to London. Yet it would do no such thing – for it was broken by the first flood tide.

A detailed survey of potential invasion beaches along the English Channel produced an alarming catalogue of vulnerability. In Dorset alone, 11 bays were listed, with comments such as: "Chideock and Charmouth are two beaches to land boats but it must be very fair weather and the wind northerly." Swanage Bay could "hold 100 ships and [the anchorage is able] to land men with 200 boats and to retire again without danger of low water at any time."

Lacking time, money and resources, Elizabeth's government could defend the most dangerous beaches only by ramming

**"Decades of neglect had rendered most of England's land defences almost useless against an experienced and determined enemy"**

Alessandro Farnese, 3rd Duke of Parma, who led Spain's 27,000-strong invasion force across the stormy seas. Only six out of 129 Spanish ships were destroyed by naval combat





## The Armada's attack... and England's shaky defences

When the Spanish Armada's 1588 attack on British shores failed, many believed it was the strength of the English navy that had defeated them. However, in reality - with only six Spanish ships lost through combat - it was the Spaniards' bad tactics and extremely bad weather that threw victory to the English.

### 1 Gravesend

A boom designed to stop enemy vessels approaching London is broken by the first flood tide.

### 2 Portsmouth

More than half the local garrison are rated "by age and impotency by no way serviceable".

### 3 Essex

Two sentinels are hauled up in court for catching partridges instead of manning Stanway beacon.

### 4 Dorset

The county militia in Dorset would "sooner kill one another than annoy the enemy".

### 5 Cornwall

When the Armada cleared the county, much of the local militia simply melted away.



## Elizabeth I / Spanish Armada

wooden stakes into the sand and shingle as boat obstacles, or by digging deep trenches above the high water mark. Mud ramparts were thrown up to protect the few cannon or troops armed with arquebuses (an early type of musket) or bows and arrows.

Fortifications on the strategically vital Isle of Wight were to be at least four feet (1.22m) high and eight feet (2.44m) thick, with sharpened poles driven into their face and a wide ditch dug in front. But the island's governor, Sir George Carey, had just four guns and gunpowder enough for only one day's use.

Portsmouth's freshly built ramparts protecting its land approaches had been severely criticised by Raleigh and were demolished, much to Elizabeth's chagrin. New earth walls were built in just four months, bolstered by five stone arrowhead-shaped bastions behind a flooded ditch. Yet more than half Portsmouth's garrison were rated "by age and impotency by no way serviceable", and the Earl of Sussex was lucky to escape unhurt when an old iron gun (supposedly one of his best cannon) blew into smithereens. In November 1587, Sussex complained that the town's seaward tower was "so old and rotten" that he dared not fire one gun to mark the anniversary of the queen's accession.

The network of warning beacons located throughout southern England since at least the early 14th century was overhauled. These iron fire baskets mounted atop tall wooden structures on earth mounds were set around 15 miles (24km) apart. Kent and Devon had 43 beacon sites, and there were 24 each in Sussex and Hampshire.

These were normally manned during the kinder weather of March to October by two "wise, vigilant and discreet" men in 12-hour shifts. Surprise inspections ensured their diligence, and they were prohibited from having dogs with them, for fear of distraction.

It was a tedious and uncomfortable patriotic duty. A new shelter was built near one Kent beacon when an old wooden hut fell down. This was intended to protect the sentinels only from bad weather and had no "seats or place of ease lest they should fall asleep. [They] should stand upright in... a hole [looking] towards the beacons." Not everyone spent their time scanning the horizon for enemy ships: two watchers at Stanway beacon in Essex preferred catching partridges in a cornfield and were hauled up in court.

In July 1586, five men were accused of plotting to maliciously fire the Hampshire beacons "upon a [false] report of the appearance of the Spanish fleet" and in the

ensuing tumult, to steal food "to redress the current dearth of corn", engage in a little light burglary of gentlemen's houses and liberate imprisoned recusants at Winchester. Most were gaoled but some were sent to London for further interrogation, for fear of a wider conspiracy.

### Ramshackle troops

Elizabeth's militia makes the enthusiastic Local Defence Volunteers of *Dad's Army* during the Nazi invasion scare of 1940 look like a finely honed war machine. A census in 1588 revealed only 100 experienced "martial men" were available for military service and, as some had fought in Henry VIII's French and Scottish wars of 40 years before, these old sweats were considered hors d'combat.

Infantry and cavalry were drawn from the trained bands and county militia. A thousand unpaid veterans from the English army in the Netherlands were recalled but they soon deserted to hide in the tenements of Kent's Cinque Ports.

Militia officers were noblemen and gentry whose motivation was not only defence of their country, but protection of their own property, too. Many living near the coast believed it more prudent to move their households inland than stay and fight on the beaches, but were ordered to return "on pain of her majesty's indignation, besides forfeiture of [their] lands and goods..."

The main army was divided into two groups. The first, under Leicester, with 27,000 infantry and 2,418 cavalry, would engage the enemy once he had landed in force. The second and larger formation, commanded by the queen's cousin Lord Hunsdon, totalled 28,900 infantry and 4,400 cavalry. These men were recruited solely to defend the sacred person of Elizabeth herself, who probably planned to remain in London, with Windsor Castle as a handy bolthole if the capital fell.

An anonymous correspondent suggested to Elizabeth's ministers that the best means to resist invasion was "our natural weapon" – the bow and arrow. It had defeated the French at Agincourt in 1415; why not the Spanish in 1588? One can imagine an old buffer, bristling at this threat to hearth and home, insisting that the bow and crossbow were "terrible weapons" that Parma's mercenaries had not faced before. After further reflection, he concluded that "the most powerful weapon of all against this enemy was the fear of God".

In the event, despite strenuous efforts to buy weapons in Germany, and arquebuses



A contemporary painting of English ships and the Spanish Armada, which, according to Tudor verse, bore sailors that were full of the pox.

from Holland at 23s 4d (£1.17p) each, many militiamen were armed only with bows and arrows. A large proportion was unarmed and untrained.

To avoid the dangers of fifth-columnist recusants in the militia ranks, every man had to swear an oath of loyalty to Elizabeth in front of their muster-masters.

Captain Nicholas Dawtrey, sent to train the Hampshire militia, warned that if 3,000 infantry crossed the Solent to defend the Isle of Wight, the Marquis of Winchester would be left "utterly without force of footmen other than a few billmen (with pole arms) to guard and answer all dangerous places".

However, local people complained about being posted away from home, they and their servants being compelled "to go either to Portsmouth or Wight upon every sudden alarm, whereby their houses, wives and children shall be left without guard and left open by their universal absence to all manner of spoil".

Hampshire eventually raised 9,088 men but Dawtrey pointed out that "many... [were] very poorly furnished; some lack a head piece [helmet], some a sword, some one thing or other that is evil, unfit or unseemly about him". Discipline was also problematic: the commander of the 3,159-strong Dorset militia (1,800





## WHAT IF THE ARMADA HAD GOT THROUGH?

If luck had gone their way, Spain could have ruled England.

England's poorly armed militia and uncompleted defences would have been overwhelmed by Spanish invaders had they successfully landed in Kent with the heavy siege artillery carried by the Armada.

Based on the speed of his 22,000 troops – after invading Normandy in 1592 they covered 65 miles in just six days – the Duke of Parma could have been in London within a week of landing.

As the Spanish anchored off Calais, 4,000 militia based in Dover deserted, possibly because they were unpaid but more probably through abject fear. The port's defences were hastily stiffened by importing 800 Dutch musketeers, who promptly mutinied.

The loyalty of the inhabitants of Kent was uncertain. Informers reported that some rejoiced "when any report was [made] of [the Spaniards'] good success and sorrowed for the contrary" while others declared the Spanish "were better than the people of this land".

The Spanish identified potential collaborators, and enemy leaders to be captured. Elizabeth was to be detained unharmed and sent to Rome.

Those "heretics and schismatics" who faced a sticky end if Spain was victorious included the Earl of Leicester, his brother the Earl of Warwick and brother-in-law the Earl of Huntingdon, Lord Burghley, "Secretary Walsingham", Sir Christopher Hatton and Lord Hunsdon. These were "the principal devils that rule the court and are the leaders of the [Privy] Council".

The list of "Catholics and friends of his majesty in England" was headed by "the Earl of Surrey, son and heir of the Duke of Norfolk [actually the Earl of Arundel] now a prisoner in the Tower" and "Lord Vaux of Harrowden, a good Catholic, a prisoner in the Fleet [prison]".

The document reported that "the greater part of Lancashire is Catholic, the common people particularly, with the exception of the Earl of Derby and the town of Liverpool". Westmorland and Northumberland remained "really faithful to his majesty".

Amphibious landings, however, are the most risky of all military operations, with everything dependent on weather and tides. And the English fleet would have to be destroyed first.

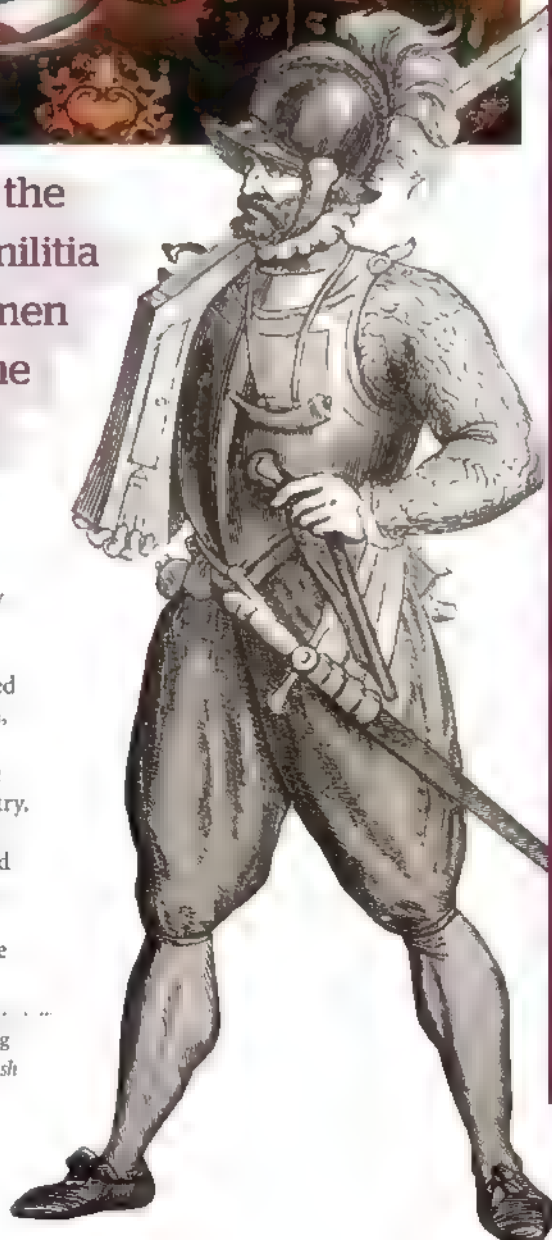
**"The commander of the 3,159-strong Dorset militia firmly believed his men would 'sooner kill one another than annoy the enemy' "**

totally untrained) firmly believed they would "sooner kill one another than annoy the enemy".

When the Armada eventually cleared Cornwall, some of the Cornish militia, ordered to reinforce neighbouring counties, thought they had done more than enough to serve queen and country. Their minds were on the harvest, and these reluctant soldiers decided instead to slink away from their commanders and their colours.

The Spanish would now be someone else's problem. **II**

Robert Hutchinson is a historian specialising in the Tudor period, and author of *The Spanish Armada* (W&N, 2013).



# ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

**Charlotte Hodgman** speaks to Tara Hamling about the evolution of theatrical performance and the beginnings of the public playhouse

Most people assume that public playhouses were a common sight in England's towns and cities throughout the Elizabethan period. Yet according to Dr Tara Hamling this simply wasn't the case. "The first commercial public playhouse wasn't built until 1567 – almost ten years into Elizabeth's reign," she says. "And though these dedicated spaces for the performance of plays must have offered exciting new leisure opportunities in the capital, when it comes to explaining how people across the country experienced drama, performance and pageantry during the 16th century, they are only part of the story."

Mystery and miracle plays formed the bulk of early Elizabethan drama – as they had done for centuries. These plays, which dramatised the Bible and the lives of saints, were closely linked to the Catholic church calendar and were performed at specific times of the year, coinciding with church feast days.

Decorated pageant wagons were pulled around a city or town, stopping off at key locations to perform in outside spaces for the public. Over the course of a day, players would enact the whole Bible, beginning in the morning with the creation and ending in the evening with the last judgment.

However, Henry VIII's split from the Catholic church and the subsequent establishment of the English church under Elizabeth I in 1559 spelled the beginning of

the end for these essentially Catholic performances, which were identified as one of the 'corruptions' of the rejected Roman Catholic religion. The virtual disappearance of religious-themed dramas created a vacuum – one that was soon filled by the tragedies, comedies and history plays we now associate with Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

This new breed of drama was performed by professional actors who toured the country, putting on plays wherever they could find work.

Chronicle plays dramatising England's history, such as John Bale's *King John*, a vehemently anti-Catholic piece, offered a popular alternative to the biblical dramas of the early 16th century, and were not dependent on the church calendar.





The reconstructed Globe theatre in London. The original building opened in 1599 but burned down in 1613 during a performance of William Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*

Plays were often staged at inns. These were important forerunners to the permanent playhouses, and often featured balconies overlooking an inn yard, and a temporary gate set up to collect an entrance fee

However, life was to become increasingly hard for these wandering troupes of travelling players during Elizabeth's reign after a royal proclamation in 1559 called for the licensing of plays for performance. A later act in 1572 restricted the movements of touring players further by labelling all those without a noble patron as vagabonds who were to "be grievously whipped and burned through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch about". The Elizabethan authorities regarded travelling actors of no

fixed abode with extreme suspicion. Their misgivings were only increased by the fact that performers could attract large audiences – often in taverns and inns – which were in turn viewed as a threat to the security of the realm.

Alongside the plays staged by touring companies in inns, guildhalls and even churches were civic entertainments performed in the streets, often prompted by a royal visit. During their visits to towns and cities across the kingdom the monarch often stopped along the way to watch pageants and plays.

While inn yards and guildhalls continued to be used during the 1560s and 1570s, the proliferation of purpose-built playhouses in London was to change the face of drama in the late Tudor period.

The first playhouse – the Red Lion in Whitechapel, built in 1567 – was the brainchild of a grocer who erected scaffolding in the grounds of a farmhouse. Soon other businessmen were following suit, and nine more dedicated playhouses appeared in the outskirts of London between 1575 and 1578. Their location in the seedier areas of the city, among bear baiting and brothels, conveniently placed them beyond the control of the authorities.

Hamling concludes: "It is clear that a range of different locations and spaces were used for Elizabethan performance, some of which can still be visited today."

Tara Hamling is a senior lecturer in early modern history at the University of Birmingham and teaches at the Shakespeare Institute

### ELIZABETHAN DRAMA 10 PLACES TO EXPLORE

#### 1 All Saints Pavement, York

● [www.allsaintspavement.org.uk](http://www.allsaintspavement.org.uk)

Mystery plays, performed by the city's different craft guilds, took place in York from the mid-14th century. There is only one known surviving copy of text for one and this contains more than 14,000 lines of rhyming verse as well as some 300 speaking/singing parts and roles.

By the end of the 14th century there were 12 different locations in York at which players would stop and perform all 50 plays over the course of a day before moving on to the next stop on the city

tour. Performances started at around 4am and could continue until midnight.

Many of the designated stations along the route were placed at street junctions, and some even had tiered seating. The last of the 12 venues in York was the bustling All Saints Pavement. All Saints church, outside which the plays were performed, is still open to the public and its stained glass window depicts the biblical themes of no fewer than eight of the mystery plays once performed in York.



#### 2 Perran Round, Cornwall

It seems that, despite the suppression of mystery plays during the Elizabethan period, in Cornwall they somehow managed to survive longer than elsewhere in the country. There are two possible reasons for this: first, they were performed in Cornish, and therefore could not be policed as thoroughly; and second, Cornwall's distance from London may also have kept these performances away from the beady eyes of the central authorities.

Perran Round, also known as St Piran's Round, is a raised circular earthwork thought to have once been an enclosed farmstead, but which was

#### 3 The Royal Mile, Edinburgh

● [www.royal-mile.com](http://www.royal-mile.com)

Edinburgh's Royal Mile has long been associated with official royal entries and often saw street theatre meet royal performance in a triumphant celebration.

On 2 September 1561, Mary Queen of Scots and her royal party set out on a royal entry into Edinburgh, travelling from Holyrood House along the Royal Mile to the sound of cannon fire. The party was met first on Castle Hill by 50 young men dressed up like fantastic blackamoors, a fairly common feature of Renaissance pageants symbolising exotic forces of disorder, which had to be tamed by the authority of a Christian ruler.

With crowds filling the streets, Mary continued her procession, borne aloft by 16 'honest' men of the town and followed by a cart containing child singers and musicians. The party made several stops along the way to witness a particular pageant or staged tableau. At the first stop was a wooden archway, decorated "with fine colours", where the queen



A street performer entertains the crowds on Edinburgh's historic Royal Mile

paused to listen to the singing of "certain bairns in the maist heavenly wise". Upon a scenery cloud, under the arch, was a young boy about six years old who, according to the Domestic Annals of Scotland, "descended down as it had been ane angel, and deliver it to her hieness the keys of the town, together with ane Bible and ane Psalm-boik covert with fine purpoure velvet".

Royal entries across Europe were important public relations opportunities for the crown, as well as excellent examples of street theatre and other forms of lavish entertainment in which the monarch was expected to participate. Edinburgh's Royal Mile connects Edinburgh Castle with Holyrood House and is thought to be the city's oldest street





The raised circular earthwork of Perran Round in Cornwall where mystery plays were performed.

used as an open-air theatre during the medieval period. It is believed that scriptural plays were performed here until the 1590s.

Cornish mystery plays of the type probably performed at Perran Round are referred to in Richard Carew's Survey of Cornwall in 1602. Carew states that in order to perform the Cornish scriptural plays "they raise an earthen amphitheatre in some open field". This suggests that, where sites such as Perran Round did not exist, hill-and-ditch theatres were constructed expressly for the purpose.

Perran Round, which is 130 feet in diameter and surrounded by a six-foot-deep ditch, is still used for open-air performances and can be accessed on foot.



**1 All Saints Pavement,**  
York, North Yorkshire

**2 Perran Round,** near  
Perranporth, Cornwall

**3 The Royal Mile,** Edinburgh

**4 The Great Hall,** Hampton Court  
Palace, London

**5 George Inn,** Southwark, London

**6 Kenilworth Castle,**  
Warwickshire

**7 The Guildhall,** Stratford-upon-  
Avon, Warwickshire

**8 Chirk Castle,** Wrexham, Clywd

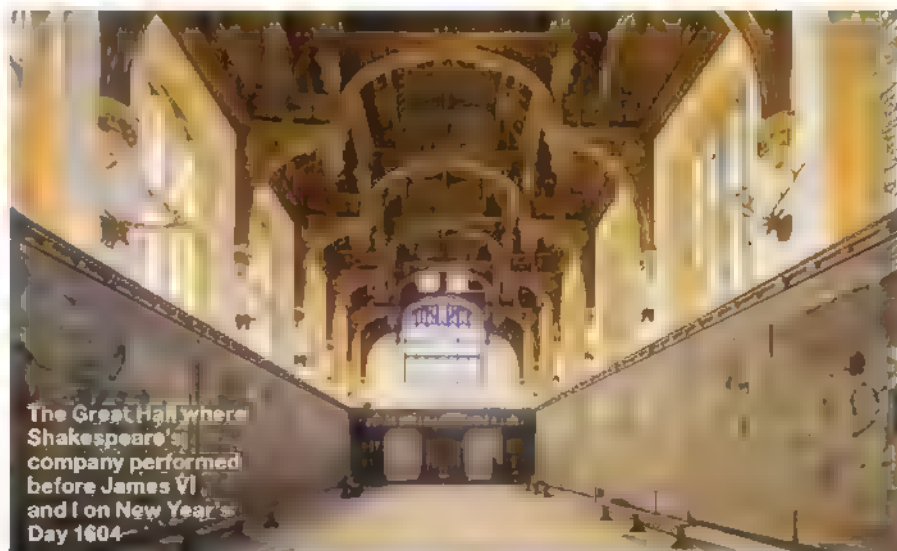
**9 The Globe,** Southwark, London

#### **4 The Great Hall,** Hampton Court Palace, London

● [www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace](http://www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace)

Royal entertainment was not solely restricted to royal entries and open-air performances while on a progress around the country. Monarchs would often employ companies of players to entertain them at court – and the Great Hall at Hampton Court Palace is a wonderful example of spaces used for such festivities. We know that Shakespeare's company performed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there before James VI and I on New Year's Day 1604.

The hall was also used regularly as a theatre during the reign of Elizabeth I, and in 1572 a stage was erected against the screen, with an adjoining chamber serving as a dressing room for the players; the Great Watching Chamber was reportedly used for rehearsals. The Great Hall appears to have continued its role as a part-time theatre well after the establishment of permanent playhouses; its final performance is recorded as



The Great Hall where Shakespeare's company performed before James VI and I on New Year's Day 1604.

taking place on 18 October 1731, although the stage was not finally cleared away until 1798.

Hampton Court Palace itself was built around 1514 for Henry VIII's one-time favourite Cardinal Wolsey. In 1529, as Wolsey fell from grace, the king claimed

the palace for himself, adding the present Great Hall between 1532 and 1535. The space is often described as the last medieval great hall of the English monarchy, with its magnificent hammerbeam roof and sumptuous wall hangings. It is open to the public.

## ELIZABETHAN DRAMA 10 PLACES TO EXPLORE

### 5 George Inn, Southwark, London

● [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/george-inn](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/george-inn)

Elizabethan open-air public theatres were almost certainly modelled on inn yards, featuring balconies that overlooked the stage, an open space in the centre and a stage to one side. The George Inn is London's last remaining galleried inn and was possibly a venue for plays during the Elizabethan period. Evidence suggests that at least six similar London inns were sites for performances during the

second half of the 16th century, although these no longer survive.

Inn performances could be raucous affairs and contributed to the general belief that acting was a shady career. One famous affray took place in 1583 at a Norwich inn when two actors pounced on a man who refused to pay and set upon him with the swords they were using in the performance, leading to the fatal stabbing of the assaulted man's companion.

The George Inn is now a National Trust property and can be visited by the public.



The George Inn is London's only remaining galleried inn. Plays would have been performed in the yard.

### 6 Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire

● [www.english-heritage.org.uk/Kenilworth](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/Kenilworth)

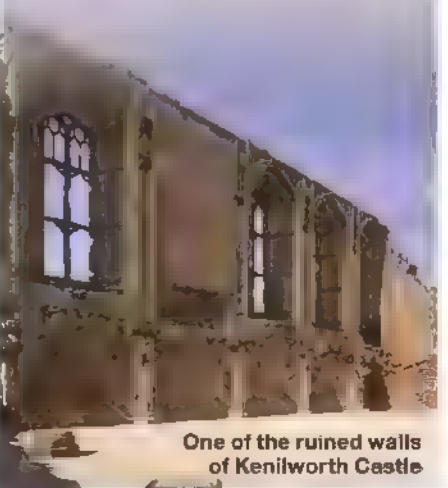
The entertainments laid on for Queen Elizabeth I at Kenilworth Castle in July 1575 are a fine example of the often highly politicised nature of courtly entertainment.

On this occasion, the queen was visiting Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, to whom she had bestowed Kenilworth Castle in 1563; Elizabeth stayed for 19 days, her longest sojourn in a courtier's house during any of her progresses. Plays, fireworks over the lake, lavish masques and dancing were all laid on for the royal party, and dramatic performances celebrated the presence of the monarch while attempting to influence her policies – Dudley at the time was campaigning for a marriage to the queen, as well as a militant Protestant foreign policy.

Sources tell us that the plays performed were mainly on the theme of marriage, including the enactment of a pretend folk wedding during which a 35-year-old virgin marries, as well as other performances of a classical nature on the subject of love. Dudley was using theatre to bring the queen around to his way of thinking.

Some of the performances, however, were censored before they made it to the stage and the queen appointed officers to screen the plays prior to the performance to ensure they were appropriate for royalty.

Kenilworth Castle gradually fell into dilapidation, but much of the building's shell remains, including a reconstruction of the Elizabethan Garden created by Dudley for the queen's visit in 1575.



One of the ruined walls of Kenilworth Castle

### 7 The Guildhall, Stratford-upon-Avon

● [www.shakespearesschoolroom.org](http://www.shakespearesschoolroom.org)

Guildhalls, Moot Halls and common halls were other popular locations for travelling players and Stratford's Guildhall, built in 1417 as a two-storey feast-hall for the town's Guild of the Holy Cross, would

almost certainly have been a location for performances by visiting players. These would have been laid on by some of the leading names in contemporary theatre, and keen playgoers would have known, and followed, the key actors of the time, much like today's celebrities.

Shakespeare himself grew up in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon and, as befitted the son of a leading townsman, attended the Stratford Grammar School as a child. It is generally believed that he was educated in the room above the Guildhall. Shakespeare, who probably left for London in around 1586/7, is now buried in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church.

The building is now a family-friendly heritage attraction called Shakespeare's Schoolroom and Guildhall, open to visitors on weekdays.



Stratford-upon-Avon's Guildhall was once the Grammar School, attended by a young William Shakespeare



Chirk Castle was the venue for an extravagant masque in 1634



### 8 Chirk Castle, Wrexham

● [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk-castle](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk-castle)

In-house entertainment for the upper classes was another popular avenue for theatre throughout and beyond the Elizabethan period. We have evidence for such entertainment taking place at Chirk Castle in 1634 when Sir Thomas Middleton apparently laid on an extravagant masque.

Banquet entertainment involved participation from guests who would dress in extravagant costumes, becoming part of the entertainment itself. It was seen as the total artistic experience, combining poetry, music, dance and plays with elaborate scenery and dress.

Such entertainment, which certainly didn't come cheap, was organised by the lord or lady of the house and was hugely extravagant and indulgent, focusing on

eating, drinking and generally making merry. Travelling troupes of players could also provide the theatre, demonstrating how street performance was adapted to private households.

Chirk Castle, which was completed in 1310, is the only Welsh castle from the reign of Edward I to be lived in today. The building and gardens are open to the public and are owned by the National Trust.



The reconstructed Globe theatre, which opened in 1997

### 9 Shakespeare's Globe, London

● [www.shakespearesglobe.com](http://www.shakespearesglobe.com)

Like most permanent playhouses of the time, the Globe was a tall, open-roofed, roughly circular structure with a cover over part of the stage and a roof around the edge of the building to protect the galleries from the elements.

Plays took place in the afternoon with actors performing on a raised stage and the audience standing in the space around the stage or seated in the galleries, according to class.

Shakespeare was one of four shareholders in the Globe. However, tragedy struck in 1613 when, during a performance of *Henry VIII*, wadding from a stage cannon ignited the thatched roof and the theatre burned to the ground. The building was rebuilt the following year, this time with a tiled roof. Shakespeare died in 1616 but his company of players, The King's Men, remained at the Globe until 1642 when the English parliament issued an ordinance suppressing all stage plays in theatres, as civil war broke out across the country. No longer of use, the building was demolished in 1644 to make way for tenements. Work to rebuild the structure began in 1993 and the new Globe theatre opened in 1997.

# THE MONARCH BEHIND THE MASK

The choreographed power and painted beauty hid a queen scarred by pox, crippled by headaches and plagued by bouts of depression, explains **Anna Whitelock**

**I**n 1586, Elizabeth I declared: "We princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world; duly observed; the eyes of many behold our actions, a spot is soon espied in our garments; a blemish noted quickly in our doings."

Elizabeth's "doings" – the state of her health, her actions and behaviour – were the subjects of international speculation. Her 'private' life was of 'public' concern. Her body was held to be one and the same as England. The stability of the state depended on the queen's wellbeing, chastity and fertility.

An elderly, unmarried queen with no heir raised fears. Over the course of her reign the physical reality of Elizabeth's weak, female and ageing 'natural body' had to be reconciled with the unerring and immortal 'body politic'. As we'll see over the following pages, the 'real' Elizabeth grew ever more estranged from her public image.

**Anna Whitelock** is reader in early modern history at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her latest book is *Elizabeth's Bedfellows: An Intimate History of the Queen's Court* (Bloomsbury, 2013).





This painting by Marcus Gheeraerts portrays the age-ravaged monarch c1595, eight years before her death

## HIDING THE UGLY TRUTH

Elizabeth I, the all-glorious queen of magnificence and spectacular display, was celebrated for her ageless glamour, her white flawless skin and sumptuous clothing. She was hailed as an iconic, unchanging beauty whose appearances at court before ambassadors and other visitors were greeted with wondrous praise, celebrated in plays and poems and immortalised in countless portraits.

Elizabeth's contemporaries believed that beauty amplified female power and so they regarded the queen's splendour as confirmation of her claim to the throne. Yet over the five decades of her rule the young and noble Elizabeth, with her pretty face, red hair and slender physique, aged into an old woman with wrinkles, a reddish coloured wig to cover her balding hair, and black, rotten and foul-smelling teeth.

The marks left by smallpox, which despite the queen's protestations were definitely there, together with the lines and wrinkles around her eyes and mouth – were skilfully hidden with layers of caustic cosmetics: pungent white lead and vinegar. It was the job of Elizabeth's trusted ladies to administer to her withering face and ensure she was ready to face her public. Yet the use of lead over time ate into her skin, making it grey and wrinkled, so she would have to wear the lead base even more thickly. As Elizabeth aged, more vivid colours were applied to her cheeks and lips.

Elizabeth wore a garish vermilion, also known as cinnabar, that gave an intense red colour to her lips. However, vermilion was mercuric sulphide – so every time Elizabeth licked her lips she ingested this toxic substance. The queen may have begun to experience symptoms of mercury poisoning, including lack of co-ordination, sensory impairment, memory loss, irritability, slurred speech and depression.

The wigless, derobed, unmade-up queen should never have been seen by any except her trusted ladies. Yet in September 1599 Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, broke all the rules and stormed into the queen's bedchamber at Nonsuch Palace "where he found the queen newly up, the hair about her face". Elizabeth had just a simple robe over her nightdress, her wrinkled skin was free of cosmetics and, without her wig, Essex saw her bald head with just wisps of thinning grey hair "hanging about her ears". This was the unadorned reality of the queen's body, and the earl would pay the ultimate price for his tendency for such impulsive behaviour: he was executed for treason in 1601.

The mask of youth that Elizabeth's ladies had to create daily before anyone could see the queen was also represented in portraits. The fiction of the queen's eternal beauty was sustained by officially sanctioned face patterns and any portraits that revealed a true likeness to the ageing monarch were to be destroyed.



## WAS SHE REALLY A VIRGIN?

Elizabeth's carefully crafted image of chastity couldn't drown out the gossip about her sex life.

From her youth, Elizabeth was championed as an embodiment of chaste maidenhood and so a highly desirable marriage prospect. As she aged and moved beyond her childbearing years, but remained unmarried and childless, Elizabeth was styled ever more spectacularly as the Virgin Queen. She had sacrificed herself to the realm, and her body, fused with that of the state,

remained impregnable. In countless images she is adorned with pearls symbolising chastity, represented as the vestal virgin Tuccia in portraits, and the Virgin Mary in pageants, images and other entertainments.

From the earliest months of the reign, though, there was much talk at home and abroad that the queen was behaving in a manner that challenged this image of chastity. Foreign ambassadors' reports are full of intimate details such as Elizabeth's supposed sexual liaisons with Christopher Hatton and the Duke of Alençon.

Yet it was Elizabeth's relationship with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, that got most tongues wagging. No sooner had she ascended the throne than courtiers were

exchanging scandalous gossip about the queen's night-time liaisons with the earl.

Of course, only Elizabeth's women knew the truth; only they could vouch for her chastity. But though they were quick to defend her publicly, they might very well censure her in private. Early in the reign, Kat Ashley fell on her knees before the queen in the royal bedchamber at Hampton Court and implored her mistress to marry and put an end to the "disreputable rumours" of her relationship with Dudley. Ashley declared that rather than see these rumours spread she would have "strangled her Majesty in her cradle".

Women at the time were thought to possess more voracious sexual appetites





An engraving shows Elizabeth I hawking. Her love of hunting was seen to confirm her vigour – and also that of her nation

## FAINTING FITS AND TOOTHACHE

The Tudor queen was prone to bouts of ill health ranging from indigestion to migraines

Any sign of weakness in the queen's body threatened the stability of the realm itself. Elizabeth and her councillors were always at pains to stress her health and vigour. She would dance with ambassadors, go on annual summer progresses, lead the chase when hunting and spurn the need for medicine. Yet though Elizabeth lived to an old age, she often experienced ill health.

From the moment of her accession there was talk that the queen had a weak constitution, and ambassadors reported rumours that she was "not likely to have a long life". Since puberty she had suffered from poor health, suffering indigestion, occasional fainting fits, frequent and intense headaches, insomnia and eyestrain.

Elizabeth was extremely short-sighted, which must have made even the simplest daily tasks a real challenge. Thanks to her love of sweet things she often suffered from toothache. She also had a leg ulcer that made her lame and a target of French mockery

When a "cunning bonesetter" (surgeon) told Elizabeth that an ache in her arm was caused by a "cold, rheumatic humour" (rheumatism) and might be treated by applying ointments, Elizabeth was indignant. She banished the surgeon from her presence and was "most impatient to hear of any decay in herself, and thereupon will admit no help of physic or surgery".

Elizabeth also suffered from amenorrhoea – irregular menstruation – and her surgeons would regularly open a vein to draw blood and so bring her 'humours' back into line. Rumours circulated that this was proof that she was incapable of having children.

Foreign ambassadors bribed Elizabeth's women for information about her life, and their reports home are full of intimate details such as her light and irregular periods. Even the papal nuncio in France had a view on Elizabeth's menstrual cycle: "She has hardly ever the purgation proper to all women."

Stories that Elizabeth was physically incapable of having sex had been commonplace for years. Ben Jonson among others later claimed that the queen had "a membrane on her which made her incapable of man, though for delight she tried many".

Yet the security of the Protestant state rested upon Elizabeth's ability to produce heirs. William Cecil, the queen's principal secretary, would stress the "aptness" of the queen's body to bear children and insisted that she remained healthy and fertile.

than men, so contemporaries found it hard to believe that any woman past puberty could remain chaste of her own free will, especially if she lacked a husband to provide an outlet for her sexual energies. The king of France would jest

that one of the great questions of Europe was "whether Queen Elizabeth was a maid or no". The courts of Europe were abuzz with gossip about her behaviour.

By refusing to allow the queen's corpse to be opened and embalmed on her death, the ladies of the bedchamber were likely acting to prevent a postmortem examination that may have raised further questions about her virginity. In so doing, they and her councillors may have been performing a final act of loyalty to their 'Virgin Queen' by allowing her to remain regina intacta.



Was Sir Christopher Hatton one of several men who had an affair with Elizabeth I?



## GLORIANA'S FRAGILE MIND

Behind the tough rhetoric lay a troubled woman prone to insomnia and scared of the dark

In August 1588, as the Spanish Armada threatened to invade the shores of England, Elizabeth made her famous oration at Tilbury before her forces. In a rousing display of courage, and a call to arms, Elizabeth assured her troops of her commitment and valour, climaxing with the famous words: "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king."

Victory followed shortly afterwards, and Elizabeth was celebrated as an English heroine who stood firm to protect her nation. She was lauded in celebratory ballads, in commemorative medals, prints and portraits.

Yet while the court and country celebrated victory, the queen confined herself to her bedchamber at St James's Palace, locking the door and ordering her ladies away so that she might grieve alone. Just weeks after the Armada victory, Robert Dudley had died. Elizabeth had lost her greatest love: the man with whom she had grown up, with whom she had become infatuated and still adored. According to the report of a Spanish

agent, the queen remained in her bedchamber, refusing to speak to anyone "for some days", as her anxious women and councillors gathered outside. Finally, as concern for the queen's state of mind grew, William Cecil ordered that the doors of her bedchamber be broken down.

She may be renowned for her strength and defiance but Elizabeth was scared of the dark. At night she would rely on the companionship of her trusted women, her bedfellows, to comfort her. In 1576, when Dorothy Stafford, the queen's regular bedfellow, broke a leg in a riding accident, Mary Scudamore, another trusted intimate, was hastily recalled to court. As the Earl of Sussex wrote to her, "her majesty shall not in the night have for the most part so good rest as shall take after your coming". Following Mary Queen of Scots' execution, Elizabeth had sleepless nights and vivid nightmares.

After the Earl of Essex, her former favourite, was executed in 1601, Elizabeth suffered bouts of depression that drove her to seek sanctuary away from the public glare of the court among her women in the privy chamber.



A portrait thought to be of Mary Scudamore, a trusted bedfellow

When Sir John Harington, her godson, arrived at court he was shocked by what he saw. His letter to a friend paints a vivid picture of the unmasked queen. "So disordered is all order", that she had not changed her clothes for many days, she was "quite disfavoured, and unattired, and these troubles waste her much".

She now kept a sword close by her and, as Harington described, "constantly paced the privy chamber, stamping her feet at bad news and thrusting her rusty sword at times into the arras [tapestry] in great rage."

"She walketh out but little, meditates much alone and sometimes writes in private to her best friends."

TOP: PICTURE ALAMY

## GOING DOWN WITH A FIGHT

Elizabeth I's final days were spent away from her ageing body

In late October 1601, Elizabeth opened what was to be her final parliament. The queen was now in her late sixties, yet rose spectacularly to the occasion and gave a rousing speech praising her people for their love and loyalty to her and reaffirming her commitment to them.

However, at the opening ceremony her frailty was evident: her ceremonial robes of velvet and ermine had proved too heavy for her, and on the steps of the throne she had become unsteady on her feet and would have fallen, "if some gentlemen had not suddenly cast themselves under that side that tottered and supported her".

Elizabeth now struggled to maintain the dignity of her royal office. There were signs that her memory was fading and this, together with her falling eyesight, meant that she found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on state business. Letters now had to be read out loud to her, and when some courtiers arrived to pay their respects, she had to be reminded of the offices that she had bestowed upon them.

Yet still the queen would rally when she needed to. Shortly after arriving at Richmond in early 1603, despite reports that she had begun to "grow sickly", she entertained the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Carlo Scaramelli. After many hours of preparation, Elizabeth appeared resplendent and "with the confidence of a younger woman". She was adorned with a "vast quantity of gems and pearls upon her person". It was an ostentatious and, to some, an absurd sight. As she aged, she imagined, observed Sir Francis Bacon, "that the people, who are more influenced by externals, would be diverted by the glitter of her jewels, from noticing the decay of her personal attractions".

Yet the signs of the queen's decrepitude were hard to ignore. Another ambassador described how the decay in the queen's teeth was such that many had fallen out, and that "no one can understand her easily when she speaks quickly".

Elizabeth soon fell into a deep melancholy and became increasingly

"The once iconic beauty spent her final days **lying on the floor**"

unwell with a swelling in her throat. By March, as the ulcer in her throat burst, her condition deteriorated. She had stopped eating and bathing, and refused to be undressed or put to bed. As one courtier reported, she "had a persuasion that if she once lay down she should never rise" and so the queen "could not be gotten to her bed in a whole week".

Determined not to go to her deathbed, Elizabeth "sat up for whole days, supported by pillows mostly awake and speaking not at all". The once iconic beauty now spent her final days lying on cushions on the floor. Finally, as she weakened further, she was carried to bed where in the early hours of a March morning she died, just short of 70 years old. ■





## HOW AGE TOOK ITS TOLL ON THE VIRGIN QUEEN

### 1 BALDNESS

Elizabeth wore a reddish-coloured wig to hide her balding head

### 2 HEADACHES

Along with fainting fits and indigestion, intense headaches plagued the queen from puberty

### 3 MEMORY LOSS

Elizabeth had to be reminded what offices she had bestowed upon her courtiers

### 4 SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

The queen's visual impairment meant she had to have letters read out loud to her. State occasions were especially challenging for her

### 5 THROAT ULCER

The queen was afflicted by a painful swelling in her throat during the her final weeks

### 6 ROTTEN TEETH

One ambassador reported that

so many of the queen's teeth had fallen out that "no one can understand her when she speaks quickly"

### 7 SMALLPOX SCARS

Layers of caustic make-up were applied to the queen's face to mask the scars left by this often-fatal disease

### 8 RHEUMATISM IN HER ARM

A surgeon's suggestion that Elizabeth apply ointment to her

"rheumatic" arm received an icy reception

### 9 FERTILITY

The queen's ability (or otherwise) to bear children and her irregular menstruation were the subject of gossip in courts across Europe

### 10 LEG ULCER

Members of the French court were quick to ridicule Elizabeth when she was made lame by an ulcer on her leg

# The end of **Tudor** rule

Elizabeth failed to provide an heir, so upon her death the throne was handed over to the House of Stuart. But, as **Tracy Borman** explains, her successors didn't take the greatest care of the monarchy

**T**he glory of Elizabeth I's court had undoubtedly started to fade by the dawn of the 17th century, when the Virgin Queen cut a sad and lonely figure. Having long since given up the pretence that she was still the most desirable bride in Europe, she hid her aged, "crooked carcass" behind ever thicker layers of make-up and other adornments. Her grip on the affairs of court and state had also started to loosen and her people were said to be "weary of an old woman's government".

Commenting on the twilight years of Elizabeth's reign, her earliest biographer, William Camden, admitted that most of her courtiers had all but forgotten her in

their clamour to win favour with her likely successor, James VI of Scotland. "They adored him as the Sunne rising," he observed, "and neglected her as now ready to set."

Throughout most of her reign, Elizabeth had gloried in the name of Virgin Queen, telling her people they were her children and that she was "married to England". As inspired a public relations exercise as that was, it had left her country with no prospect of any direct heirs to continue the Tudor dynasty. Elizabeth refused to name her successor until almost her last gasp, all too well aware that her subjects would immediately turn their attention to them. However, it became ever more obvious that James, son of her old

'As the great-great-grandson of the first Tudor king Henry VII **James VI certainly had the strongest blood tie to the English throne.** But it was not entirely faultless"



During her later years, Elizabeth often overlooked by her courtiers as they sought the approval of James VI of Scotland

rival Mary, Queen of Scots, would be England's next monarch.

As the great great grandson of the first Tudor king, Henry VII, James certainly had the strongest blood tie to the English throne. But it was not entirely flawless. Henry VIII, whose relations with Scotland had always been turbulent, had excluded the descendants of his sister Margaret (great-grandmother of James VI) from the succession. By 1603, however, this legal obstacle weighed less than the pressure to secure a peaceful succession.





James would claim the throne after the death of Elizabeth I – but the new monarch was far more interested in pleasure than business

“Although trouble had been feared, it was a **remarkably peaceful transition** from one royal house to another”

Elizabeth had made public relations an art form with her constant progresses and public ceremonials, James spurned the eager attentions of his new subjects.

Neither did the new king cut a very manly figure. Physically weak and uncoordinated, “his walk was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walk fiddling about his codpiece”. Rumoured to be a homosexual, James also delighted in surrounding himself with the most handsome men at court.

The first Stuart court presented a stark contrast to the culture and refinement of the last Tudor one. Sir John Harington described a series of lavish royal entertainments held early in the new reign. Marvelling at how well-born ladies and gentlemen alike “wallow in beastly delights”, he went on to recount one particularly drunken evening when the actors of a play staged for the King’s pleasure were “in a staggering condition” and concluded their performance “sick and spewing”. Harington reflected that, during the old queen’s reign, he “never did see such lack of good order, discretion, and sobriety, as I have now done”. His disapproving tone was soon echoed across the country.

Meanwhile James, who was dangerously unconcerned about his subjects’ opinions, consistently neglected state business in his pursuit of pleasure. He even instructed the Privy Council “to take the charge and burden of affairs, and foresee that he be not interrupted or troubled with too much business” in order to devote his time to hunting. His arrogant, disrespectful attitude – which was later displayed even more flagrantly by his son and heir, Charles I – sowed the seeds of discontent that would soon find full, terrifying expression. The Tudors had never lost sight of the paramount importance of public opinion: it had been the bedrock upon which they had established their dynasty. In disregarding it, the Stuarts would bring the English monarchy to its knees. **II**

**Tracy Borman** is an author and historian. Her latest book is *The Private Lives of the Tudors* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2016)

On the night of 23 March 1603, as Elizabeth lay virtually senseless in her bedchamber at Richmond Palace, just a few hours from death, one of her councillors asked if James of Scotland should be her heir. By way of answer, Elizabeth lifted her hand to her head and slowly drew a circle around it to indicate a crown. The moment Elizabeth’s last breath left her body in the early hours of the following day, the courtier Sir Robert Carey was dispatched with all speed to Scotland, where he conveyed the news to James. By the end of the day he had been proclaimed King of England. Although trouble had been feared, in the end it was

a remarkably peaceful transition from one royal house to another. The extraordinary, dazzling, glorious Tudor era was over; the Stuarts now reigned supreme.

### Anewage

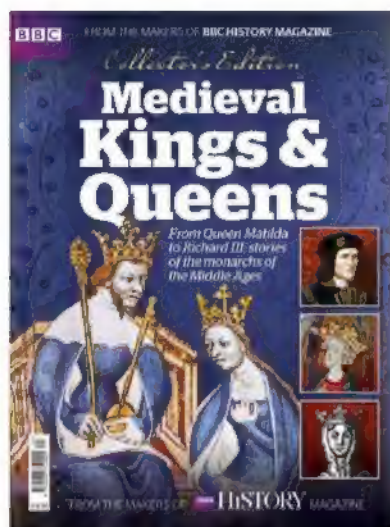
While James prepared to travel south to his new kingdom, anticipation among his new subjects at the prospect of meeting ‘the bright star of the North’ reached fever pitch. After half a century under the authority of queens, the accession of a king was greeted with enthusiasm in many quarters. The reality was something of a disappointment. James lacked the natural charm and charisma of the late queen. Whereas



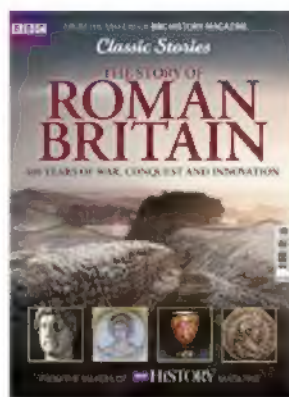
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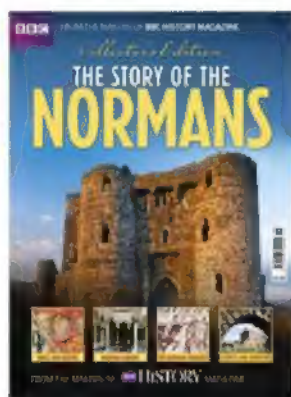
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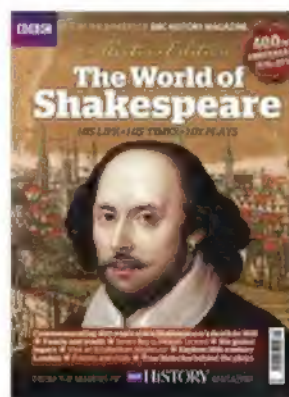
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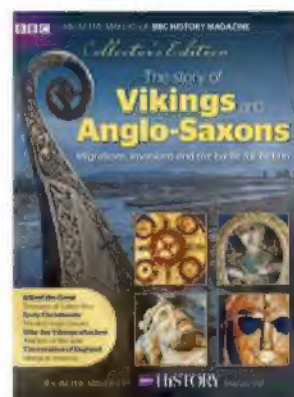
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**"To be a king and wear a crown is a thing  
more glorious to them that see it than  
it is pleasant to them that bear it"**

Elizabeth I

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